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Emotional Independence

Awakening begins with seeing the reality within
 Theme: A study of the 3 lower mental fetters
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The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe.
 If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened.
 But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself.
 (Rudyard Kipling)¹

1 Types and goodness of independence**1.1 GOOD IS POSSIBLE**

1.1.1 Religion is most useful and uplifting when it reminds us that good is possible, and empowers us to do *good*, so that we become healthy individuals who benefit society. Benefitting from good means enjoying true happiness here and hereafter. Happiness here ideally comprises physical independence, economic independence, social independence, emotional independence, and spiritual independence. These are the best bases we can ever have for happiness hereafter: for, if we live wholesomely now, it follows that our hereafter will be wholesome, too. [1.2]

1.1.2 Physical independence is basically good health, characterized by a wholesome control of our body and speech (that is, keeping to the 5 precepts).² Such good health allows us to be productively engaged in right livelihood so that we are **economically independent**. This means that we earn a living wholesomely without harming self, others or the environment;³ in short, in keeping with the 8 right livelihood precepts.⁴ We are then in a good position to be contributive members of our community and society without being misled by others or drowned by the crowd. Indeed, we might even be empowered to be able turn their lives in a wholesome direction.

1.1.3 Being **emotionally independent** means that we are capable of thinking for ourselves, and yet sensitive to individual differences in others to promote solidarity. **Spiritual independence** is our capacity for happiness through inner stillness without the need for external approval or support: we are our own refuge, the liberating truth [the Dharma] is our refuge.

1.2 SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

1.2.1 The Buddha's discourses constantly remind us that *good is possible*, that we can, through self-effort, awaken to great creativity and spiritual freedom. **The (Loka) Assāda Sutta** (A 3.102) succinctly explains the nature of the world and the possibility of goodness, thus:

Bhikshus, if there were no gratification in the world,
 beings would not be *attached* to this world.

But, bhikshus, because there is gratification in the world, beings are attached to this world.

Bhikshus, if there were no danger in the world,
 beings would not be repulsed at this world.

¹ Often misattributed to Nietzsche, as quoted in Arthur Gordon, "How to live with life," Reader's Digest Assoc, 1965.

² On the 5 precepts and their values, see SD 1.5 (2) Table.

³ On the threefold purities of moral action (our actions "should not harm us, or others, or both"), see SD 37.8 (2.1.1.2).

⁴ The 8 right livelihood precepts are those of abstaining from (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) sexual misconduct, (4) false speech, (5) malicious speech, (6) harsh speech, (7) from frivolous talk, and (8) wrong livelihood: SD 37.8 (1.6.2.2).

But, bhikshus, because there is danger in the world, beings are repulsed at this world.
 Bhikshus, if there were no escape from the world,
 beings could not escape from this world.

But, bhikshus, because there is an escape from the world, beings can escape from this world.
 But, bhikshus, so long as the world's beings have directly known, as it really is,
 the gratification as gratification,
 the danger as danger,
 the escape as escape,
 to that extent, bhikshus, they dwell with a mind
 that is *free* from it (the world), detached from it, released from it,
 not confined to this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā,
 in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

(A 3.102/1:260), SD 14.7

1.2.2 And the Saḷha Sutta (A 3.66) celebrates the joy of the liberated mind, that is free from unconscious views and latent tendencies, with this review knowledge, thus:⁵

He understands thus:

Previously there was greed in me—that was unwholesome.

Now there is none—this is wholesome.

Previously there was hatred in me—that was unwholesome.

Now there is none—this is wholesome.

Previously there was delusion in me—that was unwholesome.

Now there is none—this is wholesome.

Thus, in this very life itself he dwells hunger-free, quenched, cooled,
 enjoying happiness, become divine himself.

(A 3.66,18-19/1:197), SD 43.6

2 How to awaken

2.1 WHY WE DO NOT AWAKEN

2.1.1 Ignorance and craving

2.1.1.1 We are stuck in a rut of sadness and suffering simply because we do not know how to get out of it. Our ignorance (*avijjā*) is the prison walls; our craving (*taṇhā*) the prison bars. Ignorance and craving are like conjoined twins that sustain our negative existence. While *ignorance* is a blindness, an inability or refusal to see beyond the surface of things, *craving* is a panic seeking and collecting selfish ends. Ignorance is blind; craving is lame. So Ignorance carries Craving on his shoulders; Craving tells Ignorance where to go, and Ignorance blindly obeys.⁶

2.1.1.2 Where there is ignorance, a lack of true learning, craving flourishes; craving feeds ignorance, reinforcing the false reality that ignorance has fabricated. If we are caught in this double-bind, then the painful reality is that we are slaves to ignorance and craving. In our ignorance, we look for answers outside of ourselves, since we doubt ourselves; in our craving, we look up to those we see as able to provide us with what we think we lack, so we become superstitious, hoping that luck will bring us profitable connections, wealth and happiness.

2.1.1.3 In a word, or rather, a phrase, we have fallen into **mental slavery**; we are slaves of how we think. We imagine a fixed self, fed by ignorance and craving. This all adds up to a big empty ego, like a balloon that need to be inflated every now and then. Sometimes, it is inflated too much, we burst and break down. More often, we feel that there is no breath in us: we feel depressed and crushed with the

⁵ On latent tendencies, see *Anusaya*, SD 31.3; on the 3 unwholesome roots, see (*Akusala Mūla*) *Añña Titthiyā S* (A 3.68/1:199-201) & SD 16.4.

⁶ The diabolical duo of ignorance and craving work together to bring what in legal jargon is known as “willful blindness”: see eg Margaret Heffernan, *Willful Blindness*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2011.

weight of ignorant and craving. Mental slaves are always mentally crushed under their own weight of self-centredness, superstition and uncertainty.⁷

2.1.2 The 10 fetters

2.1.2.1 To facilitate our understanding of what ignorance and craving really are, and so work out our own liberation, the Buddha has given us various teachings. One of the most comprehensive is that known as **the 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*), which are like ten kinds of stumbling blocks slowing us down on our path to awakening; so, we need to break these fetters. These 10 fetters and the saints who are freed from them are as follows:

(1) self-identity view,	<i>sakkāya,diṭṭhi</i>	
(2) spiritual doubt,	<i>vicikicchā</i>	
(3) attachment to rituals and vows,	<i>sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa</i>	
(4) sensual lust,	<i>kāma,rāga</i>	
(5) aversion,	<i>paṭigha</i> ⁸	
(6) greed for form existence,	<i>rūpa,rāga</i>	
(7) greed for formless existence,	<i>arūpa,rāga</i>	
(8) conceit,	<i>māna</i>	
(9) restlessness (or remorse),	<i>uddhacca</i>	
(10) ignorance.	<i>avijjā</i>	(S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377) ⁹

2.1.2.2 The overcoming of all the 10 fetters fully awakens us, making us arhats (*arahata*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram,bhāgiya*) (that bind us to the lower or sense-worlds),¹⁰ and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham,bhāgiya*) (nos 6-10) (that keep us in the higher divine planes).¹¹ Either way, they keep us fettered to samsara (cyclic lives). The breaking of the lower 5 fetters makes us non-returners (*opapātika* or *anāgāmi*).¹² The breaking of the first 3 fetters makes us streamwinners (*sotāpanna*),¹³ and this is what we will focus on here, that is, a study of the first 3 fetters.¹⁴

2.2 ENTERING THE STREAM

2.2.1 The 2 “packages”

2.2.1.0 The Buddha, as it were, offers us two life-style training “packages,” that is, the monastic and the lay. This is how we can train ourselves effective in the 3 trainings—in moral virtue, mental cultivation

⁷ On a modern manifestation of “slave mentality,” as honestly observed, see Bo Yang, *The Ugly Chinaman*, St Leonards, NSW (Australia), 1991:129-134 (written in 1985).

⁸ In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*).

⁹ The 10 fetters are a well known set: see **Kīṭa,giri S** (M 70) @ SD 11.1 (5.1) & (**Sekha**) **Uddesa S** (A 4.85) @ SD 3.3(2). Comy to Satipaṭṭhana S (M 10) lists these 10 fetters: sensual lust, aversion, conceit, views, doubts, attachment to rituals and vows, lust for existence, envy, miserliness, and ignorance (MA 1:287,32). Various other sets of fetters are found in the suttas. **Potaliya S** (M 54) lists killing, stealing, false speech, slander, greed-and-desire (*giddhi,lobha*), angry fault-finding (*nindā,rosa*), angry despair (*kodhūpāyāsa*), and arrogance (*atimāna*) as the 8 “fetters” (as they bind us to samsara) (M 54.6-13/1:361-363), SD 43.8. Also a set of 7 fetters—complaisance (*anunaya*), aversion (*paṭigha*), views (*diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), conceit (*māna*), lust for existence (*bhava,rāga*), and ignorance (*avijjā*)—are given in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.3(13)/3:254) (called “latent tendencies,” *anusaya*, at (12), prec it), (**Saṅkhitta**) **Saṃyojana S** (A 7.8/4:7), (**Saṃyojana**) **Pahāna S** (A 7.9/4:8). Single fetters are also found: **Te,vijja Vaccha,gotta S** (M 71) has “fetter of the house-life” (*gihi,samyojana*) (M 71.12/1:483); **Taṇhā Saṃyojana S** (It 1.2.5) has “fetter of craving” (It 1.2.5/8).

¹⁰ On the 5 lower fetters, see **Oram,bhāgiya S** (S 45.179/5:61).

¹¹ On the 5 higher fetters, see **Uddham,bhāgiya S** (S 45.180/5:61).

¹² See **Ānāpānasati S** (M 118,10), SD 7.13.

¹³ **D 6,13/1:156, 18,1/2:200; M 11,12/3:81; S 22.109/3:161, 48.2+3/5:193, 55.24+ 25/5:377, 378; A 3.85,2/1:231 f, 4.88,2/2:88 f.** On the streamwinner, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

¹⁴ For the breaking of the 10 fetters and the levels of sainthood, see **Kīṭa,giri S** (M 70) @ SD 11.1 (5.1).

and wisdom¹⁵—according to the life-style that we have chosen or driven to follow, that is, as lay followers or as monastic renunciants.

2.2.1.1 The first is the “**express package**,” that is, the renunciation training of monastics. The monastic lifestyle with its Vinaya rules, meditation training and learning regime, provides us with an ideal environment for awakening in this life itself as arhats, or if we still have some residue of clinging, we would become non-returners.¹⁶

2.2.1.2 The second choice or “**normal package**” entails mainly the cultivation of moral virtue and the practising the perception of impermanence. This leads to streamwinning in this life itself, if not, certainly, at the moment of passing away.¹⁷ According to **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1), we should strengthen our faculty of faith or of wisdom, and direct this to the perception of impermanence. No deep meditation or dhyana is mentioned. As such, this is the special practice for lay-persons, or for monastics who are unable to meditate.¹⁸ [3.3.5]

2.2.2 This notion of the “two packages” or training alternatives is not a novel conception, but an observation of the drift the teachings throughout the Nikāyas. Take, for example, **the (Khandha) Sotāpanna Sutta** (S 22.109), the streamwinner is referred to as “a noble disciple” (*ariya, sāvaka*).¹⁹ In the very next discourse, **the (Khandha) Arahanta Sutta** (S 22.110), where the arhat is defined, he is addressed as “a monk” (*bhikkhu*).²⁰ As a rule, we will see that in the Nikāyas, the streamwinner is always explained in terms of a noble disciple, while the arhat is referred to as a monk.²¹

The term “noble disciple” (*ariya, sāvaka*) is a broad term applying to monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen, that is, both the monastics and the laity. Streamwinning (and once-return) clearly is the minimal goal that applies to all who walk the eightfold path. Arhathood, as a rule, applies mostly, to monastics who are able to attain dhyana, and so transcend the grasp of all sensual and worldly pleasures and comforts.²²

2.2.3 Breaking through into spiritual freedom

2.2.3.1 Our first real step towards spiritual freedom is called streamwinning, boarding the boat on the stream that flows into the sea of nirvana. Technically, to be **a streamwinner**, we have to break the first 3 fetters, that is to say:

- (1) **Self-identity view** (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*). We must fully abandon any notion of identifying with our body or mind as “self,” except in the conventional sense for the sake of reflection and communication. In other words, we do not see ourselves as being “embodied” in any way as a “fixed self” or permanent entity. [3]
- (2) **Spiritual doubt** (*vicikicchā*). We need to cultivate wise faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the sangha: that is, we understand and accept the possibility of human salvation as exemplified by the Buddha without relying on any kind of external agency; we understand the 4 noble truths and the eightfold path as *the* means to spiritual liberation; and we understand that there are those who have attained liberation, namely, the 4 kinds of saints.²³ [4]

¹⁵ See *Sīla, samādhi, paññā*, SD 21.6.

¹⁶ See **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 2:314); **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 1:62); **Kiṭṭagiri S** (M 1:481); **Aññātara S** (S 5:129); **Nirodha S** (S 5:133); **Añña S** (S 5:191); **Dve Phalā S** (S 5:236); **Phalā S 1** (S 5:311); **Phalā S 2** (S 5:314); **Iddhi-pāda S** (A 3:82); **Sati Supaṭṭhita S** (A 3:143); **Pabbajjā S** (A 5:108); **Paṭisallāna S** (It 39); **Sikkhānisamsa S** (It 40); **Jāgariyo S** (It 41); **Dvayatānupassanā S** (Sn pp140, 148). “Either final knowledge...non-return,” *diṭṭhe ca dhamme aññā sati vā upādisese anāgāmitā ti*.

¹⁷ See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7, or any of the remaining 9 suttas in **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25.2-10/3:225-228).

¹⁸ See **Udakūpama S** (A 7.15/4:11-13), SD 28.6.

¹⁹ S 22.109/3:160 f @ SD 16.7(5). See also S 48.2+3/5:193; S 48.26/5:205; S 48.32/5:207..

²⁰ S 22.110/3:161 @ SD 80.20. See also S 48.4+5/5:194; S 48.27/5:205; S 48.33/5:208.

²¹ See S:B 1091 n221.

²² There are, of course, exceptional cases of laymen arhats: see SD 37.4 (4).

²³ The 4 kinds of saints are the streamwinner (*sotāpanna*), the once-returner (*sākadāgāmi*), the non-returner (*anāgāmi*), and the arhat (*arahanta*). See **(Sekha) Uddesa S** (A 4.85), SD 3.3(2).

(3) **Attachment to rituals and vows** (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*). We are not superstitious²⁴ but are spiritually self-reliant, that is, for solace or salvation, we do not rely on any external agency (such as God, gods, spirits, etc) and we do not look outside of ourselves or the true teaching for the cultivating of our moral virtue, mind, wisdom and liberation, and we will never consciously break any of the 5 precepts (or any other moral training-rule we have freely taken up). [5]

2.2.3.2 This is only a summary of the 3 fetters, which will be discussed in some detail below [3-5]. The traditional description of a streamwinner is found in **the (Sekha) Uddesa Sutta** (A 3.85), thus:

Here, bhikshus, a monk is **fully accomplished in moral virtue but gains only limited concentration, gains only limited wisdom**. Whatever lesser and minor rules that he might transgress, he rises above them.²⁵ What is the reason for this?

Here, bhikshus, there is no incapability, I say. For, here he is consistently *virtuous*, established in moral virtue and undertakes to train in the training-rules that are fundamental to the holy life²⁶ and that befit the holy life.²⁷

With the total destruction of the 3 lower fetters,²⁸ he is a **streamwinner**, not bound for the lower world,²⁹ sure of going over to self-awakening. (A 3.85,2/1:231 f), SD 3.3(2)

2.2.6 Furthermore, with the weakening of the 3 unwholesome roots—greed, hate and delusion—we are able to rise higher to attain the level of a **once-returner**. While the streamwinner can awaken within 7 lives (all of which would be good human births or higher), the once-returner has only one more life, when his karmic remnants are exhausted, and he awakens.³⁰

2.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL NATURE OF THE FETTERS

2.3.1 The 3 fetters—self-identity view, attachment to rituals and vows, and spiritual doubt—prevent us from taking the very first step to awakening. Psychologically, these 3 fetters are cognitive in nature. As streamwinners, in other words, we have completely given up what cognitive psychologists would call “maladaptive cognitions” or “negative core beliefs.” In simple terms, this is how we *think*.³¹

When these unwholesome ways of looking at things are given up, our basic understanding and perspective of ourselves change for the better. We have a better sense of selfhood—not in the sense of an unchanging soul (*jīva*) or a bond with some universal self (*attā*), but as a **liberated being**, in the sense

²⁴ To be superstitious means to attribute our difficulties and misfortunes to “bad luck” or some external agencies (“others”), instead of learning to calm and focus our mind, and use it to solve the problems, or find better ways of living. Examples of superstitions are resorting to “good luck” or “karma-purifying” ceremonies where some objects from our workplace or our personal effects or even finger-nails are blessed! See **Superstition**, SD 79.1.

²⁵ Take, eg, the case of Sarakāṇi who, despite breaking the precept against intoxicants in due course dies a streamwinner. See **Sarakāṇi S 1** (S 55.24/5:375-377), SD 3.6.

²⁶ “That are fundamental to the holy life,” *ādi, brahmacariyika*. BDict: *ādibrahma, cariyaka sīla* = “morality of genuine pure conduct.” This comprises right speech, right action, right livelihood (the 3rd 4th and 5th factors of the noble eightfold path).

²⁷ “That befit the holy life,” *brahmacariya, sārappa*. That is, it conduces one to gain the moral virtue connected with the 4 paths (AA 2:349)

²⁸ **The (first) 3 fetters**: see A 3.85.2(4) & n (the 10 fetters) @ SD 3.3(2).

²⁹ *Avinīpāta*, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of *vinīpāta*, “the world of suffering,” another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*) (Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (*pañca, gati*) (D 3:234=33.2.1, A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (*nīraya*), the animal birth (*tirachāna, yoni*), the ghost realm (*pitti, visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura, kāya*) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (*sugati*). For a discussion, see Nyanaponika & Bodhi (tr), *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 1999:14-19. See **Pañsa, gati S** (A 9.68/4:459), SD 2.29.

³⁰ For details, see **Kīṭa, giri S** (M 70) @ SD 11.1 (5.1).

³¹ It is more difficult to correctly deal with how we feel, which happens with the “express package” leading to non-return and arhathood, when the more subtle fetters (esp the last 5) are all destroyed. [2.3.3]

that we are no more the product of how we perceive the world, but that we are living in true harmony with the world within and without.

2.3.2 The streamwinner and the once-returned. However, although both the streamwinner and the once-returned may have abandoned “maladaptive cognitions,” they have only given up basic beliefs and assumptions that are false and negative, they do not automatically sublimate or correct their latent tendencies, that is, emotions and drives that are shaped and triggered by *lust, aversion and ignorance*.

Cognitively, we may relate to our sense-experiences more wholesomely, but we may continue to act in the same neurotic ways.³² That is why religious dignitaries, even those who are branded with all kinds of status and titles, still badly mess themselves up and hurt others.³³ The point is that they are not even streamwinners yet. For, if they are, they would have the strength not to break even the 5 precepts.

2.3.3 The arhat, on the other hand, has overcome not only the first 5 fetters (which fetter how we *think*), but also the 5 higher fetters (which control our *feelings*).³⁴ This second set of fetters is rooted deep in the unconscious, powerfully influencing our feelings and motivations. It is relatively easier to transform cognitions and beliefs, making them wholesome, than to change our feelings, motivations, and impulses.

Understandably, the core of this deepest group of fetters is “conceit” (*māna*), the remnant of the tendency to compare and measure self with others—this is the root of *narcissism* or self-love.³⁵ The higher fetters, as such, have to do with rooting out the residues of narcissistic attachments, of finally freeing the mind from self-idolization and from idolizing others.³⁶

3 Self-identity view³⁷

3.1 DEFINITION. In simple terms, “self-identity view” (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*) is our identifying ourselves with our bodies or minds, that is, seeing some sort of abiding entity in any of **the 5 aggregates**—our body, feelings, perception, karma and consciousness³⁸—that’s all we really are: *all interdependent and changing processes*. This stock definition of self-identity view, found in the suttas and the Abhidhamma, is from **the Mahā Puṇṇama Sutta** (M 109):

[A certain monk:] “Bhante, how does self-identity view arise?”³⁹

[The Blessed One:] “Here, bhikshu, the untutored ordinary person who is not a seer of the noble ones, and is unskilled in the Dharma of the aryas [noble ones], undisciplined in the Dharma of the aryas, who is not a seer of the true persons,⁴⁰ and is unskilled in the Dharma of the true per-

³² Take the case of the streamwinner, **Ānanda**, who, traumatized by the Buddha’s impending death, declares, “Bhante, I have seen the Blessed One in comfort, and I have seen the Blessed One enduring it. And, bhante, my body has become weak [unwieldy] as if drugged [drunk]. I’m disoriented and things are unclear to me as a result of the Blessed One’s illness.” See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16,2.24/2:100), SD 9; see also S 47.13/5:162; Tha 1034.

³³ See **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17.

³⁴ On the 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*), see **Udakūpama Sutta** (A 7.15/4:11-15), SD 28.6: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/28.6-Udakupama-S-a7.15-piya2.pdf>

³⁵ See **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a esp (4).

³⁶ See Reflection, “You have to be somebody before you can be nobody,” R128, 2003 = *Revisioning Buddhism*, Singapore, 2011: ch 14; also Jack Engler, 2000:3 www.enlightennext.org/magazine/j17/engler.asp.

³⁷ Parts of this section appear in **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3 (5.1).

³⁸ On the 5 aggregates (*pañca-khandha*), see **(Dve) Khandhā S** (S 22.48/3:47 f), SD 17.1a.

³⁹ Also called “identity view,” or simply “self-view.” §§10-11 as at **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,7-8/1:300). “Self-identity view,” *sakkāya, diṭṭhi* (M 109/3:17,23 = S 22.82/3:102,5), but SĀ 58 = T14c29 has “I conceit,” 我慢 *wǒ màn*. See **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81), SD 6.1(4).

⁴⁰ “True person,” *sappurisa*, also “virtuous person,” “ideal person.” The qualities of a *sappurisa* are given at D 33,2.2(6)/3:252, 34,1.8(7)/3:283; M 113; A 7.64/4:113, 8.38/4:144 f & at M 110,14-24/3:23 f.

sons and undisciplined in the Dharma of the true persons, considers⁴¹ [**the 20 kinds of self-identity views** (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), namely:]⁴²

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| (1) <u>form</u> | as <i>the</i> self,
or form as <i>in the self</i> , | or the self as <i>possessing</i> form,
or the self as <i>in form</i> ; |
| (2) <u>feelings</u> | as the self,
or feelings as in the self, | or the self as possessing feelings,
or the self as in feelings; |
| (3) <u>perception</u> | as the self,
or perception as in the self, | or the self as possessing perception,
or the self as in perception; |
| (4) <u>formations</u> | as the self,
or formations as in the self, | or the self as possessing formations,
or the self as in formations; |
| (5) <u>consciousness</u> | as the self,
or consciousness as in the self, | or the self as possessing consciousness,
or the self as in consciousness. ⁴³ |

[18] This, bhikshu, is how self-identity view arises.”⁴⁴

The self-identity view, as such, is a kind of survival instinct, ranging from simple selfishness, to appropriateness, to blatant narcissism—an “I” first attitude, or all is “mine” conduct, or “me” above all vision.⁴⁵ This is the kind of “knowledge” we are born or “hard-wired” with, without which we are unlikely to survive biologically—a biological conditioning to ensure that the species not only survives, but thrives. However, this very same kind of knowledge *holds us back* us tenaciously as a merely biological being, a mere number in a species or statistic in a group.⁴⁶ It is a fetter that holds us in a prison of unawakening.

⁴¹ “Considers,” *samanupassati* = *sam* (completeness) + *anu* (after) + *passati* (he sees), ie, to look at intuitively (with wisdom).

⁴² **Paṭisambhidā, magga** illustrates **the 4 basic modes of self-identity view** in connection with form in this manner. One might wrongly regard form as self in the way that the flame of a burning oil-lamp is identical to the colour of the flame. Or one might wrongly regard self as possessing form just as a tree possesses a shadow. Or one might wrongly regard form as in self as the scent is in the flower. Or one might wrongly regard self as in form, as a jewel is in a casket. (Pm 1:143 f)

⁴² **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,7 f/1:300), too, lists these 20 kinds of self-identity views in connection with the 5 aggregates. The Cūḷa Vedalla S Comy (MA 2:360) here qu **Paṭisambhidā, magga** to illustrate the 4 basic modes of self-identity view in regard to form: see prec n on Pm 1:143 f. See SD 2.16 (15.2).

⁴³ The Chinese version here mentions only these 3 self-identity views: 見我 *jiàn wǒ*, 異我 *yì wǒ*, 相我 *xiāng wǒ*, “seeing as I, as other than I, as mutually present” (SĀ 58 = T2.14c29). Choong 2000:59 draws attention to two Saṃyukta Āgama sutras that are helpful here. The first, SĀ 45 = T2.11b5, describes the viewing of self in regard to the aggregate of form as 見色是我 *jiàn sè shì wǒ*, 色異我 *sè yì wǒ*, 我在色 *wǒ zài sè*, 色在我 *sè zài wǒ*; and SĀ 109 @ T2.34b13, giving a similar list but slightly shorter, 見色是我, 異我, 我在色, 色在我. “Thus,” notes Analayo, “見我和異我 refer to identifying the aggregate of self and to taking the aggregate to be owned by the self, corresponding to *rūpam attato samanupassati* and *rūpavantaṃ vā attānaṃ* in M 109/3:17,27.” The Madhyama Āgama version of this formula such as that in MĀ 210 = T1.788a28 (parallel to M 44/1:300,7) is more intelligible: 見色是神 *jiàn sè shén*, 見神有色 *jiàn shén yǒu sè*, 見神中有色 *jiàn shén zhōng yǒu sè*, 見神中有色也 *jiàn shén zhōng yǒu sè yě*. (For further details, see Analayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya*, Taiwan, 2011:631 n218).

⁴⁴ **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,8/1:300), SD 40a.9; **Mahā Puṇṇama S** (M 109,10/3:17 f = S 22.82/3:103 f), SD 17.11; **Isi,datta S 2** (S 4:287 ×2); **Vaccha,gotta S** (S 4:395, 396, 397×2); **Dhs** 1003/182 = 1217/212 f (*atta, vād’upādāna*), 1262/221. Cf **Bhadd’eka,ratta S** (M 3:188 f), **Ānanda Bhadd’eka,ratta S** (M 3:190 f), **Uddesa Vibhaṅga S** (M 3:227 f); S 3:3, 4, 16, 17, 42, 44×2, 46, 56, 102×2, 113, 138, 164, 165; A 2:214 f; Nc:Be 186 (“self-view,” *attā’nu-diṭṭhi*), 271; Pm 1:143, 149, 150×2, 156.

⁴⁵ For studies, see “**I**,” **the nature of identity** (SD 19.1), “**Me**,” **the nature of conceit** (SD 19.2a), “**Mine**,” **the nature of craving** (SD 19.3).

⁴⁶ For a reflection on this, “We got class?” R241, 2012: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/12-0523-We-got-class-81.pdf>.

This means that we must fully abandon any notion of identifying with our body or mind as “self” or essence, except in conventional terms for the sake of reflection and communication. In other words, we do not see ourselves as being “embodied” in any way as a permanent entity.⁴⁷ We are not what we *have*—we cannot own “our” body or mind; we *are* what we do, what we say, what we think. If we master them, then we are truly our own masters.⁴⁸

3.2 HOW SELF-IDENTITY PROLIFERATES.⁴⁹ The *Samanupassanā Sutta* (S 22.47) gives a succinct explanation of the self-identity view, how it arises and how it is overcome. After showing how the 20 kinds of self-identity views arise through our identifying with the 5 aggregates [3.1], the Sutta goes on to point out *where* self-identity crises arise—in the mind and its mind-objects, rooted in ignorance—thus:

Bhikshus, since the view ‘I am’ has not left him, there occurs the descent of the 5 faculties,⁵⁰ that is,

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|
| (1) the faculty of the eye | <i>cakkhu'ndriya,</i> | |
| (2) the faculty of the ear | <i>sot'indriya,</i> | |
| (3) the faculty of the nose | <i>ghan'indriya,</i> | |
| (4) the faculty of the tongue | <i>jīvh'indriya,</i> and | |
| (5) the faculty of the body | <i>kāy'indriya.</i> ⁵¹ | [§7.1] |

Bhikshus, there is the mind, there are mental objects, there is the element of ignorance.⁵²

When an untutored worldly [ignorant ordinary] person is touched by a feeling born of sense-contact associated with ignorance,

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) ‘I am’ occurs to him, or | <i>asmī 'ti pi'ssa hoti</i> |
| (2) ‘I am this’ occurs to him, or | <i>ayam aham asmī 'ti pissa hoti</i> |
| (3) ‘I will be’ occurs to him, or | <i>bhavissan 'ti pi'ssa hoti</i> |
| (4) ‘I will not be’ occurs to him, or | <i>na bhavissan 'ti pi'ssa hoti</i> |
| (5) ‘I will have form’ occurs to him, or | <i>rūpī bhavissan 'ti pi'ssa hoti</i> |
| (6) ‘I will be formless’ occurs to him, or | <i>arūpī bhavissan 'ti pi'ssa hoti</i> |
| (7) ‘I will be percipient’ occurs to him, or | <i>saññī bhavissan 'ti pi'ssa hoti</i> |
| (8) ‘I will be non-percipient’ occurs to him, or | <i>asaññī bhavissan 'ti pi'ssa hoti</i> |
| (9) ‘I will be neither-percipient-nor-
non-percipient’ occurs to him. | <i>n'eva,saññī,nāsaññī bhavissan 'ti pissa hoti</i> |

These 5 faculties, bhikshus, remain just the way they are.⁵³ (S 22.47,5-7/3:46 f) + SD 26.12 (4)

The Saṃyutta Commentary explains the phrase, “**By a feeling...rooted in ignorance**” (*avijjā,samphas-sa,jena*), as the contact associated with ignorance (*avijjā,sampayutta,phassa*) (SA 2:270), that is, sense-experiences coloured and filtered by our ignorance of true reality.

⁴⁷ For a study, see “**I,**” **the nature of identity**, SD 19.1.

⁴⁸ See Dh 160, 380.

⁴⁹ This section is based on *Samanupassanā S* (S 22.47/3:46 f) @ SD 26.12 (5). The Sutta gives a succinct explanation of the self-identity view.

⁵⁰ Comy: When there is this group of defilements, there is the production of the 5 faculties conditioned by defilements and karma (SA 2:269). This short sentence, says Bodhi, describes “the rebirth process contingent upon the persistence of the delusion of personal selfhood.”

⁵¹ “Regards (or considers),” *samanupassati* = *sam* (completeness) + *anu* (after) + *passati* (he sees), ie, to look at intuitively (with wisdom).

⁵² Comy explains “mind” (*mano*) as the karmic mind (*kamma,mano*) and “mental objects” (*dhammā*) as sense-objects (*ārammaṇa*), or the former as the life-continuum (*bhavaṅga*) and adverting consciousness (*āvajjana*). (SA 2:269 f)

⁵³ *Tiṭṭhanti kho pana bhikkhave tatth'eva pañc'indriyāni*. These 5 physical faculties (*pañc'indriya*) are referred to above in the Sutta [§5] [3.2].

The passage as a whole shows how the new karmically active phase of existence arises through the persistence of conceiving the notion “**I am**” and various speculative views of self-identity (as listed). Underlying this whole process is ignorance, its powerful latent root. When this is activated by **feeling** (*vedanā*)—that is the reaction of being mindlessly *attracted* to what is perceived as pleasant, being *repelled* by what is regarded as unpleasant, and *ignoring* what appears neutral—it gives rise to the notion “I am,” which is really a manifestation of *craving* (unconscious drive or thirst arising from a sense of lack) and *conceit* (a measuring of others in terms of self-gratification).

The notion “**I am this**” then arises, when the empty “I” is reified by identifying with one or other of the 5 aggregates. Finally, notions of *eternalism* (eternal life, creator-God, etc) and of *annihilationism* (“this is our only life,” “we are our body”) arise when the self or soul is held to survive death or to be annihilated at death.

3.3 OVERCOMING THE SELF-IDENTITY VIEW

3.3.1 One who holds such a view is said to be “trapped in self-identity” (*sakkāya pariyāpanno*), which literally means “included in self-identity” or “enmeshed in self-identity.”⁵⁴ Such a person might regard any of the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations or consciousness) in any of these 4 kinds of self-identity views, that is,

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| (1) the aggregate as | the self | just as a flame and its colour are identical, ⁵⁵ or |
| (2) the self as | possessing that aggregate | just as a tree has a shadow, ⁵⁶ or |
| (3) the aggregate as | <i>in</i> the self | just as fragrance is in a flower, ⁵⁷ or |
| (4) the self as in | <i>in</i> the aggregate | just like a jewel in its casket. ⁵⁸ [3.1] |

The Pārileyya Sutta (S 22.81) defines and discusses these 4 self-identity views and their abandonment in some detail as a means for “the immediate destruction of the mental influxes.”⁵⁹

3.3.2 In the Siha Sutta (S 22.78), the devas who regard themselves as being permanent, stable and eternal are really “impermanent, unstable, not eternal, trapped in self-identity” (S 3:85). The Commentary there explains this expression as meaning being “**included in the 5 aggregates**.” Thus, when the Buddha teaches them the Dharma sealed with the 3 characteristics (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, non-self), exposing the faults in the round of existence, the fear of knowledge enters them. (SA 2:288)

3.3.3 The self-identity view is *a wrong view* that regards any of the 5 aggregates as being permanent or the self. Each of the 5 aggregates—form, feelings, perception, formations and consciousness—is, in turn, taken as self, or as what self possesses, or as being in the self, or as what the self is in, totalling 20 types of self-identity views.⁶⁰ In each case, the Buddha points out that formations (*saṅkhāra*), craving (*taṇhā*), feeling (*vedanā*), contact (*phassa*) and ignorance (*avijjā*) that add up to the self-identity view are “impermanent, constructed, arising by way of conditions” (*aniccā saṅkhatā paṭicca, samuppannā*).

3.3.4 After showing how self-identity view *arises* [3.2], **the Samanupassanā Sutta** (S 22.4) then explains how to end it, thus:

But here, a wise noble disciple abandons ignorance and arouses knowledge.

⁵⁴ (**Mahānāma**) **Gilayāna S** (S 55.54) says that even the highest heavens are “trapped in self-identity” (*sakkāya, pariyāpanno*), and when we direct our mind to the cessation of self-identity, we gain the “cessation of self-view” (*sakkāya, nirodha*) (S 55.54, 17/2:410), SD 4.10.

⁵⁵ Mnemonic: **x = a** (where x is the self and a is an aggregate), so that when body dies, the self or soul dies, too. See SD 2.16 (15.2.1.2) for details.

⁵⁶ Mnemonic: **x ∋ a**, eg, an eternal soul existing separate from the body, a belief of the God-religions. See SD 2.16 (15.2.1.2) for details.

⁵⁷ Mnemonic: **a < x**, eg, the brahminical belief of the human soul as being a “spark” of the universal soul. See SD 2.16 (15.2.1.2) for details.

⁵⁸ Mnemonic: **x < a**, eg the popular or animistic belief of a disembodied soul that can leave the body at will. See SD 2.16 (15.2.1.2) for details.

⁵⁹ S 22.81, 12-30 @ SD 6.1.

⁶⁰ See Gethin 1986:44 f.

With the abandoning of ignorance and the arising of knowledge,	
‘I am’ does not occur to him,’ or	<i>asmī ‘ti pi’ssa na hoti</i>
‘I am this’ does not occur to him,’ or	<i>ayam aham asmī ‘ti pissa na hoti</i>
‘I will be’ does not occur to him,’ or	<i>bhavissan ‘ti pi’ssa na hoti</i>
‘I will not be’ does not occur to him,’ or	<i>na bhavissan ‘ti pi’ssa na hoti</i>
‘I will have form’ does not occur to him,’ or	<i>rūpī bhavissan ‘ti pi’ssa na hoti</i>
‘I will be formless’ does not occur to him,’ or	<i>arūpī bhavissan ‘ti pi’ssa na hoti</i>
‘I will be percipient’ does not occur to him,’ or	<i>saññī bhavissan ‘ti pi’ssa na hoti</i>
‘I will be non-percipient’	
does not occur to him,’ or	<i>asaññī bhavissan ‘ti pi’ssa na hoti</i>
“I will be neither percipient-nor-	
non-percipient’ does not occur to him.”	<i>n’eva,saññī,nāsaññī bhavissan ‘ti pissa na hoti</i> (S 22.47,7.2/3:46 f), SD 26.12

3.3.5 It is knowing and seeing this truth that leads to the immediate destruction of the mental influxes, which is arhathood. Technically, this is known as “**the ending of self-identity view**” (*sakkāya,nirodha*), and is a synonym for the third noble truth. This level entails the complete overcoming of all notions of an abiding, that is, fully understanding non-self (*anattā*).

On a simpler level, especially for a lay practitioner or a monastic who has difficulty meditating, this liberating knowledge begins with our practice of the perception of impermanence.⁶¹ Any idea of permanence of any of the aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations or consciousness) feeds the notion of self-identity, which feeds our spiritual ignorance. [2.2.2]

From this practice arises the knowledge for breaking the fetter of self-identity. With the breaking the self-identity fetter, the other two fetters—those of doubt and of attachment to ritual and vows—are also broken. The 3 fetters are all rooted in the idea of identifying with our body (form) or mind (feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness) as the self. When we break these 3 fetters, we attain streamwinning, the first real step on the supramundane eightfold path.

In **the (Mahā,nāma) Gilayāna Sutta** (S 55.54), the Buddha teaches the layman Mahānāma how to give terminal counselling to a dying person so that he attains awakening, that is, by directing the mind to the cessation of self-identity.⁶² The abandoning of the self-identity view, as we have noted, leads to streamwinning.⁶³

4 Spiritual doubt⁶⁴

4.1 Why we doubt

4.1.1 Worldly doubt. Doubt simply refers to an uncertainty arising from a lack of experience, from incomplete information, from a misconstrual of information, from being fed with false information, or from unknowing. It leaves us in a lurch of either being stuck in a situation of not knowing what to do, or of retreating in fear, or of rushing blindly ahead. Its sum effect is our being overshadowed in a *meaningless* deafness of ignorance or a *purposeless* rush of delusion. We are, as it were, puppets on the strings of delusion pulled and played by the master puppeteer, ignorance.

Yet, this ignorance is within us, so to speak. We become, to use a philosophical analogy, like blinded persons in a pitchblack room looking for a non-existent black cat. As **H L Mencken** quips, “A philosopher is a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn’t there. A theologian is the man who finds

⁶¹ See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

⁶² S 55.54/2:410, SD 4.10

⁶³ See **Samanupassanā S** (S 22.47/3:46 f), SD 26.12 & **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3 (5.1).

⁶⁴ Parts of this section appear in **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3 (5.2).

it.”⁶⁵ (The wise, we must add, looks for the switch to turn on the lights.) Ignorance, like the dark, does not do anything, and there is no black cat out there in the room. It’s our unknowing mind that acts.

4.1.2 Spiritual doubt. So doubt is an “activity” rooted in ignorance, but both these terms must be understood in the Buddhist teaching of awakening. “Ignorance” (*avijjā*) is traditionally defined as our not knowing the 4 noble truths as they are, that is, not understanding the true nature of suffering; not knowing what craving is, and so are unable to let it go; not knowing the possibility of nirvana; and not knowing the noble eightfold path, and so have no way of practice to get out of suffering.⁶⁶

Here ignorance as *avijjā* is not simply not knowing: for, even a great scholar of Buddhism with PhDs in other fields, too, would experience suffering and has not attained nirvana, not to speak of his being ignorant of certain Dharma teachings or meditation practices.⁶⁷ Nor is this the mere ignorance of a child (who might not know the theory of relativity, for example): for, this kind of ignorance has no bearing on his spiritual wellbeing. Ignorance as *avijjā*, in other words, is the absence, negation or misconstrual of the knowledge or action that leads to awakening. In this sense, *avijjā* is the opposite of *vijjā*, awakening knowledge.⁶⁸ Doubt is a debilitating activity of this ignorance, keeping us blinkered and stuck in the loop of samsara.⁶⁹

4.2 HOW DOUBT IS OVERCOME

4.2.1 The bases of doubts

4.2.1.1 **The (Nīvaraṇa Bojjhaṅga) Āhāra Sutta** (S 46.51) describes how the hindrance of doubt is overcome and prevented in meditation, thus:

7 (5) And what, bhikshus, is food for the arising of unarisen **doubt** (*vicikicchā*) and for the growth and abundance of arisen doubt?

There are, bhikshus, the bases for doubt [4.2.2.0]. Frequently giving **unwise attention** to them is food for the arising of unarisen doubt and for the growth and abundance of arisen doubt.

...

19 (5) And what, bhikshus, is not food for the arising of unarisen doubt, nor for the growth and abundance of arisen doubt?

There are, bhikshus, *wholesome and unwholesome states, blameworthy and blameless things, low and sublime states, and dark and bright states and their counterparts*. Frequently giving **wise attention** to them is not food for the arising of unarisen doubt nor for the growth and abundance of arisen doubt. (S 46.51/5:103+106), SD 7.15

4.2.1.2 Neither the text nor its commentary explains what “**the bases for doubts**” (*vicikiccha-ṭ, -ṭhāniya dhammā*) are. The subcommentary (*ṭīkā*), however, says that this is to have “doubt in the Buddha, etc [the 3 jewels]” (SAṬ:Be 2:417).

We also know the meaning of unwise attention, that is, to regard that there is some kind of abiding essence in any of our physical sense-objects; hence, arousing desire and lust after them. Wise attention, on the other hand, is seeing impermanence in any and all of such sense-objects, and also mind-objects. In other words, it is the percepton of impermanence.

⁶⁵ This famous analogy by 20th-cent journalist and satirist H L Mencken was in Laurence J Peter’s *Peter’s Quotations : Ideas for Our Time* (1977:427). Earlier variants of it has been quoted by many writers. The earliest known source is perhaps William James, in *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911 ch 1), and the English judge, Charles Bowen, in Edwin Ray Lankester’s *Science from an Easy Chair* (1913) by, p. 99.

⁶⁶ See eg (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.215/2:4), SD 5.15 & **Avijjā S**, A 10.61/5:116 @ SD 31.10. On the 4 noble truths, see **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11/5:421), SD 1.1. On the nature of ignorance, see **Anu-saya**, SD 31.3 (8) The latent tendency of ignorance.

⁶⁷ In **The notion of diṭṭhi** (SD 4a.1), we discuss how right view is not merely having correct views, but how our conduct is *transformed* in moral and spiritual senses.

⁶⁸ See **Avijjā S** (S 45.1/5:1 f), SD 94.1; also Matilal 1980; Swearer 1992; Gethin 2001:219 f; Fuller 2005:73 f.

⁶⁹ On the nature of doubts, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3 (5.2).

4.2.2 Six ways of overcoming doubts

4.2.2.0 However, the commentary on §19 list these 6 ways of overcoming doubt, namely:

(1) much learning	<i>bahu-s,sutatā</i>	
(2) investigative questioning	<i>paripucchakatā</i>	
(3) familiarity with the Vinaya	<i>vinaye pakataññutā</i>	
(4) great commitment	<i>adhimokkha,bahulatā</i>	
(5) spiritual friendship, and	<i>kalyāṇa,mittatā</i>	
(6) supportive talk	<i>sappāya,kathā</i>	(SA 3:168)

Conversely, then, we can say that the bases for doubts include: (1) little learning, (2) lack of investigative questioning, (3) ignorance (monastic and lay) with the Vinaya, (4) keeping of the precepts, (5) bad friendship, and (6) frivolous and lack of supportive talk.⁷⁰

Let us briefly examine each of **these 6 ways of overcoming doubt**.

4.2.2.1 MUCH LEARNING (*bahu-s,sutatā*) traditionally refers to having a proper teacher who is capable of giving us some kind of sustained and systematic instructions on the Dharma based on the early suttas. We could of course nowadays study these texts by ourselves where it is difficult to find a proper teacher. Due to the proliferation of patronizing gurus,⁷¹ sectarian teachers,⁷² and individualistic wanderers,⁷³ we must take great care not to be caught up with them or their teachings.

If you are a beginner, it is good to begin with a simple sutta that you like, and from there go on to read related teachings or accounts in other suttas. If it is a long sutta, first read through it once, to have some idea of it, noting interesting passages or words. Then select those sections that interest you and study them more thoroughly, including the notes and cross-references.

Another method of building your Dharma learning is to centre your research around a teaching or a theme, say, the 5 aggregates.⁷⁴ Then go on to read all you can find on the each of the 5 aggregates, or ask every teacher we meet about them. An important aspect of Dharma learning is to focus on instructive, inspiring, and reasonable aspects of the teaching and to relate or connect them to one another, and how they, as a whole, helps us in mental peace, inner joy and self-understanding.

Finally, we need to relate what we have learned about ourselves and our daily lives. How does our knowing the Dharma help us understand our personality and problems better, and help us relate to the situations and events around us? The Dharma, in other words, is a living and life-bettering experience.

“Life-bettering” here refers to a constant self-reviewing not of how much knowledge we have accumulated, but of how well we have *accepted* our weaknesses and *worked* to overcome them. We remind ourselves to forgive our enemies and send lovingkindness to those whom we have hurt. Such knowledge, as such, is “life-changing,” gradually lightening us of our negative qualities so that we progressively rise to greater levels of joy and creativity, expressed in our Dharma-moved activities.

4.2.2.2 INVESTIGATIVE QUESTIONING (*paripucchakatā*) refers to questioning about the aggregates, the elements, the sense-bases, and so on. Note down the difficulties and questions as they arise to us. Whenever there is an opportunity, ask a teacher, or connect them with a sutta passage, and make a note of that sutta passage. Go on questioning until we have a good idea of the teaching. If the teacher is not helpful, just leave him.⁷⁵

Even when we think that we have understood a teaching, we should never assume that that is all there is to it. We only have a partial view, even if a clear one, of a teaching. Even a partial view is still a view, and still *partial*. In time, we will notice that our understanding must grow and connect with other teach-

⁷⁰ Cf SA 3:168.

⁷¹ See **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17.

⁷² See **The teacher or the teaching**, SD 3.14. On “testing the teacher,” see SD 35.4a (6).

⁷³ Basically, these are those who reject the early teachings or teach some kind of self-centred hodge-podge philosophy. See **Wanderers of today**, SD 24.6b.

⁷⁴ SD 17 deals with the 5 aggregates in some detail.

⁷⁵ On bad teachers, see (**Sāla,vatika**) **Lohicca S** (D 12), SD 34.8 esp (1.2.3); on the qualities of a good teacher, see **Dūta S** (A 8.16/4:196), SD 46.7.

ings, and the picture becomes bigger and clearer still, as we begin to see the whole picture for ourselves.

Our old views, then, have served their purpose, like a rung in life's ladder. We can only move up by properly stepping on the next rung and so on. We must change as we mature spiritually; we are transformed when we directly see true reality. A very vital quality of right view is that it makes us *better persons*: right view leads to right conduct.⁷⁶

4.2.2.3 FAMILIARITY WITH THE VINAYA (*vinaye pakataññutā*). If we are monastics, make sure we know the Vinaya, especially the Pāṭimokkha, well.⁷⁷ Our first 5 years as a monk or a nun are called “dependence” or “tutelage” (*nissaya*) for a very good reason: this is the formative period when we learn to be true renunciants under proficient teachers.⁷⁸ If we miss this formative period, we will be like a rootless tree. It is only a matter of time before we fall, especially if and when we grow big with success and followers.

As lay practitioners, it is vital to understand the nature of moral virtue, that is, the cultivation of the body and speech.⁷⁹ We should understand what the 5 precepts are, their natural sequence, and their purpose, that is, as a basis for our humanity. The precepts act as a tool of quality control over our lives. If we have broken any such moral precept, it means that a certain area of our lives needs to be strengthened. We should reflect on the conditions that led to our breaking the precept, and how we can prevent future breaches, and to cultivate their respective virtues.⁸⁰

The precepts are best kept with lovingkindness and compassion. As such, we need to regularly cultivate lovingkindness.⁸¹ Such a meditation encourages us to reinforce happiness in our lives and let go of emotional pain. We also should keep wholesome friends and cultivate true-hearted friendship.⁸² And if we have the chance of meeting a good teacher, we should cultivate spiritual friendship with him and build up our meditation practice [4.2.2.5].

4.2.2.4 DEEP CONVICTION (*adhimokkha, bahulatā*). Buddhism should not be a hobby, if we want it to uplift our lives. For the Dharma to really transform our lives, we must commit ourselves to the spiritual life. “Commitment” means giving a high priority to Dharma, that is, setting aside some time for our involvement with some Dharma-inspired group, spending time with sutta study, and some meditation or mindfulness practice.⁸³

If we are new to Buddhism, we are likely to be fascinated by a certain teacher, or be attracted to a speaker who seems to endorse our views. It is good to investigate the teacher further to see if the teacher practises what he preaches.⁸⁴ Whenever we are in doubt, be moved to seek for wisdom: remember that even a great teacher may hold wrong views (they often do and on a more significant scale),⁸⁵ and to put the teaching above the teacher.⁸⁶

Occasionally, we may feel alienated from the crowd or the “elite,” because of our views, especially when we feel that the suttas are right. Our gut feeling may sometimes tell us that the conduct of a certain teacher or monastic is not right. A lay person has every *right*, indeed, it is our *duty* to politely question a monastic at an appropriate time about his monastic training (such as how many years of training he has,

⁷⁶ See Notion of *diṭṭhi*, SD 40a.1.

⁷⁷ Monastics need to instruct the laity sooner or later; thus it is helpful to know the 5 precepts thoroughly. See eg (**Sīla**) **Bhikkhu S** (A 5.286), which gives a unique set of “5 precepts” with this 3rd precepts as “he is one who abstains from incelibacy” (*abrahma, cariyā paṭivarato hoti*) (A 5.286/3:275 f), SD 89.3; also **Niraya, sagga S 1** (A 10.200.4/5:284), **Niraya, sagga S 2** (A 10.201.4/5:286), **Saṃsappanīya S** (A 10.205.5/5:290).

⁷⁸ See esp Mv 1.32.1 (V 1:60), 1.53.4 (V 1:80).

⁷⁹ On moral training, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6.

⁸⁰ On the precepts and their virtues, see **Veḷu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7) @ SD 1.5 (1+2).

⁸¹ On lovingkindness, see (**Karaṇīya**) **Metta S** (S 1.8), SD 38.3.

⁸² On true-hearted friendship, see **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31.21-26/3:187 f), SD 4.1; **Dūta S** (A 8.16), SD 46.7 (8.2);

Group karma, SD 39.1 (7.1).

⁸³ On commitment, see **Ādhipateyya S** (A 3.40/1:147-150), SD 27.3.

⁸⁴ See esp **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 47/1:317-320), SD 35.6.

⁸⁵ See (**Ahitāya**) **Thera S** (A 5.88/3:114), SD 40a.26.

⁸⁶ See **The teacher or the teaching?** SD 3.14.

who is his teacher, etc). We should not however ask personal things, such as the level of his attainment, as it is against the Vinaya for a monastic to make any such claims or even hint at them, especially for gain.⁸⁷

4.2.2.5 SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP (*kalyāṇa, mittatā*) specifically refers to a wholesome relationship between a meditation teacher and us, the pupils, which facilitates our meditation practice and spiritual development. In other words, it is a spiritual mentoring. A **spiritual mentor** not only instructs us in meditation, but also helps to mould our general character in terms of moral virtue [4.2.2.3]. This mentor is someone we can discuss our meditation difficulties with so that we are able to improve our meditation.

A dedicated spiritual mentor might even have sutta study or give Dharma instructions with us, so that we are more familiar with the Buddha's instruction in moral conduct and mental cultivation. This is in fact a good foundation for training us to become Dharma speakers, and in time, even Dharma teachers. In due course, we may mature into experienced meditation teachers and counsellors ourselves.⁸⁸

4.2.2.6 SUPPORTIVE TALK (*sappāya, kathā*). Since speech is our main means of communication and instruction, understandably, it should be wholesome. As **right speech**, it should be truthful, in terms of the form of the communication, which should be the Dharma, such as sutta teachings. Communication between teacher and pupil should itself be truthful, with the purpose of personal development. Right speech is unifying in the sense of reinforcing the fellowship and lovingkindness with our teachers and others. Our communication with others should be pleasant by way of using our speech to inspire others to mutually see our inner goodness and creativity. Our communication with others should be beneficial, in that it is somehow connected with the spiritual training and awakening.⁸⁹

4.3 HOW FAITH WORKS

4.3.1 Faith in Buddhism means unconditional acceptance, but it is **wise faith**, that is, a confidence that is rooted in truth (directly seeing some level of true reality for ourselves) and in beauty (a resultant bliss on account of that insight). It has a balanced cognitive and affective dimensions, between thinking and feeling, between head and heart.

Wise faith can arise in two ways, that is, through "the voice of another" (*parato ghosa*), by listening to the true teaching (*saddhamma, savana*), or through wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), seeing all our sense-experiences as being impermanent (AA 2:137). It may begin as an intellectual or academic understanding, but matures into spiritual insight.⁹⁰

4.3.2 Once we understand this natural truth, we also see the possibility and necessity of human awakening as exemplified by the Buddha, who teaches us the Dharma, that is, the way to awakening, and those who are on this path to awakening or have reached its destiny constitute the Sangha.⁹¹ These are the 3 jewels, our precious inspiration in the spiritual life, and the objects of our wise faith.

4.3.3 If we lack faith or our wisdom is weak, we would have neither confidence nor desire to walk the path to awakening in this life itself. We are caught up in doubts [4], which in turn make us resort to a life of rituals and vows [5]. As a result, we are still in the grip of self-identity view [3]. Hence, we will never attain streamwinning in this life.

4.3.4 If we are unable to see the urgency of aspiring to awakening in this life itself, it is as if we are being stricken with rabies, showing symptoms of near-paralysis, anxiety, insomnia, confusion, agitation, abnormal behaviour, terror, even paranoia progressing to delirium, and a fear of water. If we are caught up with **a religion of delusion**—with its magical rituals and strange superstitions—it is like being addicted to intoxicating drinks and being perpetually drunk. If we are caught up with **a religion of lust**—with

⁸⁷ On how to know a person better, see eg **Satta Jaṭila S** (S 3.11/1:77-79), SD 14.21 & **Thāna Sutta** (A 4.192/-2:187-190), SD 14.12.

⁸⁸ On characteristics of spiritual friendship, see **Meghiya S** (A 9.3/4:354-358 ≈ U 4.1/34-37) & SD 34.2 (2.1.1); also **Spiritual friendship**, SD 8.1.

⁸⁹ See **Abhaya Rāja, kumāra S** (M 58.8/1:395) & SD 7.12 (3).

⁹⁰ On the stages of learning, see SD 40a.4 (6.2).

⁹¹ The 4 kinds of saints are the streamwinner (*sotāpanna*), the once-returner (*sākadāgāmi*), the non-returner (*anāgāmi*), and the arhat (*arahanta*). See **(Sekha) Uddesa S** (A 4.85), SD 3.3(2).

its boast of greatness, pleasure, wealth, power and arrogance—it is as if we are addicted to fizzy sweetened drinks, so that our health suffers. Practising **the true Dharma** is like drinking fresh clean natural water whenever we are thirsty, and taking healthy meals when we are hungry, and having proper exercise and rest.

4.3.5 Our commitment to moral virtue, sutta study, Dharma discussion, and mindfulness practice or meditation, is the basis for our faith in hitting the path of **awakening in this life itself**. The key practice here is the perception of impermanence [2.2.2], which, when regularly done, helps us to clear away the 5 mental hindrances—sensual lust, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt—at least in their gross form. Even if we do not attain dhyana, we are able to keep the precepts well enough and have a wholesome mind so that we would be assured of streamwinning in this life itself, if not certainly at its very last moment.⁹²

5 Attachment to rituals and vows

5.1 “ATTACHMENT TO RITUALS AND VOWS” AND ITS CONTEXT

5.1.1 Definition. **The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī**, the first book of the Abhidhamma, defines “attachment to rituals and vows” (*(sīla-b.bata,parāmāsa)* as follows:

Here what is attachment to rituals and vows?

It is a view, taking up a view, grasping a view, wilderness of views, distortion, agitation, fetter, grasping, tenacious grasping, inclination, clinging of outside recluses and brahmins that “one is pure through rituals, one is pure through vows,” a wrong path, wrongness, grasping arising on account of a perversion of sectarianism.

This is said to be attachment to rituals and vows.

(Dhs 1005/183)⁹³

Its Commentary, **the Attha,sālinī**, explains that both “rituals and vows” refer to such practices as the “cow ritual” (*go,sīla*) and the “cow vow” (*go,vata*) (DhsA 355).⁹⁴ This is clearly an allusion to the “cow asceticism” (*go,vata*) and the “dog asceticism” (**kukkura,vata*) mentioned in **the Kukkura,vatika Sutta** (M 57), practised by the young Koliya, **Puṇṇa**, a cow-vow ascetic (wearing horns and a tail),⁹⁵ and the naked ascetic [*acelaka*], **Seṇiya**, a dog-vow ascetic (behaving in a dog-like manner).⁹⁶ Another case of dog asceticism is that of the naked ascetic [*acela*] Kora-k,khattiya the dog-ascetic, recorded in **the Pāṭika Sutta** (D 24).⁹⁷

5.1.2 Sīla

5.1.2.1 The word **sīla** (Skt *śīla*) basically means “(adj) like; (n) nature; habitual behaviour; ritual conduct.” In the old, pre-Buddhist sense, it means *a ritual or rituals* (as a set of practices), especially those that we habitually observe, such as the priestly conduct of the brahmins, or, in our own times, the brahm-

⁹² On faith, further see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3(5.2). On attaining streamwinning in this life itself, see See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7, or any of the remaining 9 suttas in **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25.2-10 25/3:225-228).

⁹³ *Tattha katamo sīlabbata,parāmāso? Ito bahiddhā samaṇa,brāhmaṇānaṃ “sīlena suddhi, vatena suddhi, sīla-b,batena suddhīti yā eva,rūpā diṭṭhi diṭṭhi,gataṃ diṭṭhi,gahanam diṭṭhi,kantāro diṭṭhi,visūkāyikaṃ diṭṭhi,vipphanditaṃ diṭṭhi,samyojanam gāho paṭiggāho abhiniveso parāmāso kummaggo micchā,patho micchattam tith’āyatanam vipariyāsa-g,gāho. Ayaṃ vuccati sīla-b,bata,parāmāso.* (Dhs 1005/183)

⁹⁴ See also MA 1:73; AA 2:132, 3:392 = VA 5:1082; UA 289; NmA 1:101, 234; DhsA 377.

⁹⁵ M 57.4-6/1:388 f @ SD 23.11. Comy says that he wore horns on his head, tied a tail behind him, and went about eating grass with the cows (MA 3:100)

⁹⁶ Comy says that he exhibited all the actions typical of a dog, and the both of them were play-mates (*saha,pamsa-kīṭikā sahayakā*) (MA 3:100).

⁹⁷ D 24,1.7-10/3:6-9 @ SD 63.3.

inical jesuitry⁹⁸ in religion (including Buddhism). In the phrase, *sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*, *sīla* means “conduct, nature,” especially *ritual habit*, as in the common phrase, “by this ritual or vow or asceticism or holy life, I will become some kind of god or other.”⁹⁹

Here “ritual” also means a *ritualistic* or “external” way of keeping the precepts, that is, taking them merely as rules, keeping them without any lovingkindness, and concerned only with personal purity or status, or to attract the devotion of others, instead of taking it as the basis for mental cultivation.¹⁰⁰ This is confirmed by the phrase’s key element, *parāmāsa* [5.1.4].

5.1.2.2 In Buddhist teaching and practice, the Buddha re-defines *sīla* in a positive sense, as “precept or training-rules (both singular and collectively),” “moral conduct,” and “moral virtue.” Thus, theoretically (as a teaching), *sīla* means “moral virtue,” and as practice, “training-rule, precept.” In a morally accomplished person, both theory and practice, teaching and realization, training and goal, truth and value, are unified.¹⁰¹

In a truly spiritual person, especially someone who has attained to the path to awakening, moral conduct and virtue are as natural as breathing. As such, a holy man or saint would never break any of the precepts. Moral virtue, in other words, is both means and end.¹⁰² He would be wise enough to know how to help others within his embodiment of moral conduct and great wisdom, as he is accomplished in wisdom and conduct (*vijjā,carāṇa,sampanna*).¹⁰³

5.1.3 Vata. The old meanings of *vata* (Vedic *vrata*), as given in the Pali-English Dictionary (PED), is (1) “a religious duty, observance, rite, practice, custom,” or (2) “manner of (behaving like) a certain animal (as a practice of ascetics).” We shall look at each of these in turn.

5.1.3.1. *VATA AS RITUAL HABIT.* The first meaning of *vata* is “a religious duty, observance, rite, practice, custom,” in both the positive and negative senses. The positive senses are of two kinds: relating to Buddhist practice and to worldly practice (such as meritorious actions).

We find the positive Buddhist sense of *vata* in the following passages:

- **Kula Gharaṇī Sutta** (S 9.8) a monk’s practice (*vata*) is hindered by intimate socializing.¹⁰⁴
- **Sīla-b,bata S** (A 3.78) only religious practices that promote wholesome states are worth practising (A 3.78/1:225), SD 79.10.

Positive or neutral usages of *vata* in the worldly sense are found in the following suttas:

- **Brahmā Baka Sutta** (S 6.4) the Buddha recounts Brahmā Baka’s past religious practice.¹⁰⁵
- **(Mahā Kaccāna) Lohicca Sutta** moral conduct and religious practice are useless without sense- (S 35.132) restraint. (S 35.132/4:117), SD 60.5.
- **Duṭṭh’atṭhaka Sutta** (Sn 782) advertising our vows and rituals is said to be ignoble.
- **Mahā Viyūha Sutta** (Sn 898) moral conduct and religious routine alone are not enough.
- **Serissaka Vimāna Vatthu** (Vv 84) a deva is asked about his past religious practice (*vata*).

⁹⁸ This expression comes from two of the darkest manifestations of what is exploitative and pernicious in religious history. “**Brahminical**” refers to the use of religion as a legitimizer of status or class, by inducing a dependence on rituals of purification or salvation through an external agency or priestcraft. “**Jesuitry**” refers to the use of religion as a tool of gaining power and control through intrigue and casuistry. Casuistry is argumentation that is specious or excessively subtle and intended to mislead others, and equivocation (a statement that is not literally false but that cleverly avoids an unpleasant truth).

⁹⁹ *Iminā’haṃ sīlena vā vatena vā tapenā vā brahma,cariyena vā devo vā bhavissāmi dev’aññataro vā.* See eg **Ceto,khila S**, M 16.12/1:102= SD 51.4.

¹⁰⁰ On the 3 trainings, see *Sīla samādhi paññā*, SD 21.6.

¹⁰¹ On this important notion of not dichotomizing truth and value, “is” and “ought,” see **The notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40a.1 (13.6).

¹⁰² See **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 (3.3).

¹⁰³ On this quality, “accomplished in wisdom and conduct,” see *Buddhānussati*, SD 15.7 (3.3).

¹⁰⁴ This Sutta has a surprising turn. S 9.8/1:201* @ SD 44.10.

¹⁰⁵ S 6.4/1:143,22* @ SD 11.6.

A negative sense of *vata* is found in these passages:

- **Cetaso Vinibandha S** (A 9.72) “moral virtue, vows, asceticism and the holy life (celibacy)” (*sīla vata tapa brahma, cariya*) become mental bondage if we practise them for the sake of going to heaven.¹⁰⁶
- **Dāru-k, khandha S 1** (S 35.241) (same as preceding) (S 35.241/4:180), SD 28.5.
- **Gaṇikā Sutta** (U 6.8) (same as above) (U 6.8/71 f), SD 79.14.

Clearly, the two terms, *sīla* and *vata*, overlap, the main difference perhaps being that *sīla* has a key element of abstention or omission, such as not taking certain kinds of food, while *vata* involves mostly observances and commission, such as the cow-vow or the dog-vow. However, it is very common to see the compound *sīla, vata* as referring to a unitary idea of “ritual observance or conduct,” especially when taken to be good in itself, as an end, a notion that is clearly rejected in **the Mahā Viyūha Sutta** (Sn 898).

5.1.3.2 VATA AS IDENTIFICATION. *Vata*, by itself, has the sense of a “manner of (behaving like) a certain animal (as a practice of ascetics)” (PED). The suttas and commentaries mention such bestial asceticism as those of ascetics who each lived like a cow (*go, vata*),¹⁰⁷ like a dog (*kukkura, vata*),¹⁰⁸ like an elephant (*hatthi, vata*),¹⁰⁹ like a horse (*assa, vata*),¹¹⁰ like a goat (*aja, vata*),¹¹¹ like a bat (*vagguli, vata*),¹¹² or like a crow (*kāka, vata*).¹¹³ There are, of course, rituals dedicated to specific kinds of beings (such as devas, yakshas, nagas, harpies, asuras and gandharvas) and specific gods (such as the sun deity, the moon deity, Indra, Mahā Brahma).¹¹⁴

Of special interest are ascetic practices that involve animal worship or imitating their behaviour. In other words, this is a form of **identification**. Cow-asceticism in ancient India is probably explainable by the fact that it was predominantly agricultural society where cattle were vital for ploughing the fields, serving as draught-animals, and so on. Cattle were also regarded as wealth. What is valuable is often treated with great awe and respect. Identifying with a cow would imbue a devotee with a sense of sacred power and attract the devotion of others.

It is also possible that in the previous life, the bestial ascetic was the animal that he identifies with. As such, in this life he is naturally and inexplicably drawn to such a behaviour. Whatever the reason, the bestial ascetic might also be motivated by the notion that such a practice is empowering so that he would win the adoration and support of devotees.

In **the Kukkura Vatika Sutta** (M 57), the Buddha gives this clear warning against such bestial practices:

Fully and without break, having cultivated the dog-vow, having cultivated the conduct of a dog, having cultivated the mind of a dog, having cultivated the thought of a dog,
he would, after death, with the body’s breaking up, be reborn in the company of dogs!

But if he has such a view as this:

“By this moral virtue, or this vow, or this asceticism, or this celibacy, I will become a deva or one amongst them”—this view of his is wrong view, he is one with wrong view.

Puṇṇa, there are two destinies for one with wrong view, I say: either hell or the animal kingdom!¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶ A 9.72/4:461 @ SD 79.13.

¹⁰⁷ M 57/1:387-389 (MA 3:101); Nm 1:92, 2:310; SA 2:399; NmA 1:209; J 489/4:319; VbhA 490.

¹⁰⁸ D 24/3:6; M 57/1:387-389 (MA 3:191); Nm 1:92, 2:310; SA 1:81.

¹⁰⁹ Nm 1:92, 2:310; SnA 2:527, 558; NmA 1:215, 2:366.

¹¹⁰ Nm 1:92, 2:310; NmA 1:217.

¹¹¹ SA 1:81, 2:399; J 489/4:319; NmA 1:209; VbhA 490.

¹¹² DA 3:838; MA 2:11; DhA 4:152; Seta, ketu J, J 377/3:235, Uddālaka J, J 487/4:299.

¹¹³ Nm 1:92, 2:310

¹¹⁴ Nm 2:310; Nc:Be 49.

¹¹⁵ Qu at Kvu 14.8.3/505. Bodhi: “It should be noted that a wrong ascetic practice has less severe consequences when it is undertaken without wrong view than when it is accompanied by wrong view. Although few nowadays will take up the dog-duty practice, many other deviant lifestyles have become widespread, and to the extent that

As such, Puṇṇa, if his dog vow is fulfilled [succeeds], it takes him to the company of dogs; if it is unfulfilled, it takes him to hell!” (M 57,3/1:388), SD 23.11

5.1.4 Parāmāsa. The word *parāmāsa* is resolved as *parā* (“over-”) + √MRŚ, “to touch, feel,” meaning, “touching, contact, being attached to, hanging on, being under the influence of, contagion (Dhs:R 316)” (PED). As such, *parā,māsa* means “a state of being unduly influenced (by a view) or unnecessarily dependent (on something external).” In the Attha,sālinī, Buddhaghosa analyses it as *parato āmasantīti parāmāsā: parā,māsa* means “they handle things (dharmas) as other” (than what they really are, for example, they transgress the real meaning of “impermanent,” etc, and say “permanent”) (DhsA. 49). Hence, we can take *parāmāsa* as meaning “reverse, perverted,”¹¹⁶ in an excessive way.

As pathological behaviour, this may suggest an **obsessive-compulsive disorder** (OCD). We are pre-occupied with lists, rules, details, schedules, organization, or orderliness, to the point that the origin task is forgotten and uncompleted. In a religious situation, the actual purpose of the religious life is altogether forgotten. We are excessively devoted to our task to the exclusion of everything else, especially what is wholesome. We are inflexible on morals, ethics, and values, and are very rigid or stubborn in conduct.

In other words, we do not really have any control over our actions: we simply have to do such routines. If such a behaviour remains undetected and untreated, it might even endanger lives, including that of the patient himself. However, if we understand the nature of attachment to ritual and vows, and notice its symptoms early, we can ourselves break them, or seek spiritual or professional help.

5.2 SUPERSTITION

5.2.1 Causes and effects

5.2.1.1 Essentially, **superstition** is a false belief or wrong view that “there is a reason for everything,” and that “reason” is a single cause behind any act or event. As each and everyone of us would have our own reason for such a thing that has happened, it is a “personal truth” or “private truth” (*pacceka,sacca*). Since such truths are based of our views, they are really “view-truths” (*diṭṭhi,sacca*) or “view-based truths.”¹¹⁷

Although such truths can be personal, in that it originated with a certain person, but it can catch on, and be believed by many, and even form religious tenets. They are still private truths, in the sense that, although they are false, the group believe them and teach them. They are also view-truths, because the person or group strongly hold on to them and insist, “Only this is true, only this is true!” (AA 3:79), or in sutta terms, “Only this is true, all else false” (*idam eva saccam mogham aññan’ti*).¹¹⁸

5.2.1.2 First of all, **reasoning** is a human faculty; it is the way we think, and we attribute a reason to an event. When we rationalize an event that has happened, or we think or wish had happened, we give it a “reason” or “meaning.” If this reason or meaning harmonizes with true reality, then it is truly real.

Otherwise, such a reason or meaning might be “real” only to us: this is a *virtual reality*, something only real in a very private way, a personal truth, or more fully, a worldly personal truth (*puthu,pacceka,-sacca*).¹¹⁹ This is a delusion. If such a reality becomes so very private and limited to oneself that no one else experiences it and it does not reflect true reality, then it is likely to be a hallucination, or paranoia, even madness.

these are justified by a wrong view, their consequences become that much more harmful.” (M:ÑB 1260 n601). Cf **Tala,puṭa S** (S 42.2/4:307 @ SD 20.8), where it is applied to the wrong view that actors and performers are reborn amongst the “Laughing Devas.”

¹¹⁶ S 3:46, 110; A 2:42 (*sacca~*), 3:377 (*sīla-b,bata~*), 438 (id), 5:150 (*sandiṭṭhi*); D 3:48; Tha 342; It 48 (*iti,sacca~*, cf *idam,saccābhivēsa* under *kāya,gantha*); Pug 22; Dhs 381, 1003, 1175 (*diṭṭhi~* “contagion of speculative opinion”), 1498 (id). It is almost synonymous with *abhivēsa*; see *kāya,gantha* (PED: *gantha*), and cf Nc 227 (*gāha ~ abhivēsa*) and Nc under *tanhā* iii 1 C.

¹¹⁷ On the nature of views and the need to abandon them, see **The notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40a.1.

¹¹⁸ Eg **Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 136,9/3:210), SD 4.16.

¹¹⁹ See **Paṭilīna S** (A 4.38,2.1) + SD 43.10 (1.2).

5.2.1.3 Secondly, whatever happens in this world happens on account of **conditionality** (*paccaya*). In other words, *many causes* work together to produce *many effects*. Sometimes, we seem to be able to notice only a single effect, but this is because we choose to see only that effect, or we are unwilling or unable to notice other effects. This inability to see beyond a single effect is another defining aspect of superstition.

5.2.1.4 As such, **superstition** is a *misunderstanding or wrong view regarding causes and effects*, that is, an ignorance of the nature of conditionality.¹²⁰ It is a deeply seated wrong view that, when we are faced with a seemingly inexplicable event or insurmountable problem, it compels us to seek answers externally in a single cause. On a deeper level, we might conjure up demons to blame, or invoke God or gods to succour us. We end up thinking in terms of some “abiding entity” or “cosmic essence” that is behind everything.

5.2.1.5 The most common expressions of superstition are beliefs in a creator-God,¹²¹ eternal Buddhas, immortal souls, powerful demons, and so on. They are superstitions in the sense that they are at best imaginative and cultural (even race-based) ideas that have real negative effects on their believers, and indirectly also on others. However, if we understand them to be *symptoms of some deeper need for self-understanding or spiritual liberation*, then we should identify and examine those needs directly, and work toward resolving them. We should certainly not glorify the symptoms.¹²²

5.2.2 Fault-finding and excuses

5.2.2.1 An important aspect of attachment to rituals and vows is the notion that the solution to our problems, or some kind of relief or “purification,” is to be found in external actions (such as ritual offerings or self-flagellation) and from an external agent (such as turning to a God-figure or to spirits). To be **superstitious**, in simple terms, means to attribute our difficulties and misfortunes to “bad luck” or some external agencies (“the other” or “others”), instead of learning to calm and focus our minds, so that we can understand the situation (see the causes and effects), or to open our hearts to solve the problems, or to at least *learn* from the sufferings that have haunted us.

5.2.2.2 Common examples of superstitions, especially in the name of religion, are resorting to “good luck” rituals or “karma-purifying” ceremonies. In extreme cases of such superstitious beliefs, the rituals may require some objects from our workplace or our personal effects or even finger-nails that are blessed (or cursed, in the case of our detractors)! When the superstition centres around an object, especially when it is regarded as being “lucky” in itself or having some kind of power of its own, then it is called fetishism.¹²³ Such an object is called a *fetish*.

5.2.2.3 Superstition is an existential indolence or lazy lifestyle, so that we weasel up blames and excuses. It is really slothfulness at not exerting ourselves in finding *the real conditions behind issues and problems*. So we seek religion and information to endorse and reinforce our superstitions. When such endorsements or reinforcements go beyond ourselves, they can cause great and general harm, and prevent many others from their chance to become better people. If such an aberration is found in a leader, the damage can be even more harmful, widespread and lasting.¹²⁴

5.3 SUPERSTITION AND RITUALS LIMIT GROWTH

5.3.1 Religion as brainwashing

5.3.1.1 Broadly speaking, brainwashing refers to any kind of effort or process of removing old ideas or keeping out certain ideas, especially religious ones, to be replaced by new or selected ideas, approved of by a person, group or institution. Such a process is very common in God-centred religions or power-

¹²⁰ On conditionality, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16, esp (2.3).

¹²¹ On problems of God-belief, see eg **Te,vijja S** (D 13/1:235-252), SD 1.8.

¹²² See **Is there a soul?**, SD 2.16.

¹²³ The word fetish goes back to the Latin *facticius*, “artificial” and *facere*, “to make.” It is an object believed to have supernatural powers, or in particular, a man-made object that has power over others. Essentially, fetishism is the attribution of inherent value or powers to an object. See **The person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b (4.3.3).

¹²⁴ **The Three Roots Inc**, SD 31.13 (5.1-3).

based systems, but it may also be found in Buddhism where devotion is unquestioningly given to a guru or authority-figure. However, in this latter case, the term “mind-control” might be more appropriate.¹²⁵

5.3.1.2 Brainwashing can also occur in *a very private and personal way*. This form of brainwashing is essentially the limiting of ourselves to a very narrow world-view, especially a psychological or religious one, like Rapunzel in her tower, but one without any window [5.3.2]. The psychological lack of openness to true reality and wholesome change can result in various problematic types of personality disorders [Appendix], but here we will focus on the psychological effects of a very narrow and closed religious view.

5.3.1.3 How do superstitions and rituals brainwash us? Firstly, “**brainwash**” here means that we are compelled to be either unwilling or unable to see that we *are* capable of helping ourselves and of personal salvation. So we turn to an *external agency* for succour and salvation. Such an agency is often self-defined, specially shaped by our lacks, needs and fixations. Or, it is learned (heard) from others, especially by way of family or cultural conditioning, so that it is deeply imprinted upon us, preventing any new self-liberating learning.¹²⁶

5.3.1.4 **Superstition tends to objectify or thingify our natural qualities.** If we are, by nature, kind, we tend to project our goodness onto a loving God. If we have a violent trait, we see our God as a violent and vengeful One. If we are lustful by nature, we are likely to see God as allowing unbridled sexuality and passion since he created them, after all. If we are narcissistic or power-minded, then we think that God is on our side (even on our side *exclusively*), and that we have the right, even duty, to dominate, exploit, or convert others. We tend to be like the God we have created: we create the God who creates us.

5.3.1.5 Secondly, if we brainwash ourselves, it means that we almost exclusively feed our minds with only “approved” or “proper” information, and conduct ourselves only in very limited ways to prevent any kind of self-change. The motivating factors behind such self-limiting actions are **the 4 biases** (*āgati*) of greed, hate, delusion and fear.

5.3.1.6 Greed fetters us to a perpetual mating ritual of yearning and seeking what we think we lack, and so desire. Hate works to reject all that discourages or hinders us from this hunting and mating ritual. Delusion is what blinds and blinkers us so that we lose sight of everything that is good, and see and taste only what we lust for. Fear is a sense of loss at the thought of losing what we have captured or are clinging to, or simply a fear of being blamed or punished (especially a fear of pain or death). Greed or lust breeds fear, and fear blinds us, chaining us to rituals of beliefs and rituals of vain self-assurance. It is the **uroboros**¹²⁷ devouring its own tail and refusing to stop, blaming others or something else for its pain!¹²⁸

5.3.2 Emotional prisons: the Rapunzel syndrome

5.3.2.1 THE TALE. The fairy-tale of Rapunzel¹²⁹ [5.3.1], is essentially about how woodsman (a king, in the Grimms’ version) steals rapunzel, a kind of lettuce, from a witch’s garden, but is caught, and threatened with terrible punishment, unless he repays for that theft.¹³⁰ On an adult level, this fairy-tale is very significant psychologically.¹³¹ In “**Rapunzel**” (as in “Rumpelstiltskin” and “Beauty and the Beast”), an adult exchanges what he values most (his child) with a power-figure to secure personal welfare or safety. This uneven or unfair exchange, unquestioned and unchallenged in these tales, suggests desperation.

Desperate for his life and that of his wife’s, he is forced to agree to give their coming child to the witch. Having received the child, who is aptly named Rapunzel, the witch in due course keeps her locked

¹²⁵ On mind-control, see **Cult Buddhism**, SD 34.5 (1.1.3).

¹²⁶ On imprinting, see **Samaṇa Gadrabha S** (A 3.81/1:229) & SD 24.19b (1).

¹²⁷ A uroboros is a serpent or dragon biting its own tail, symbolizing samsara. The myth of Sisyphus reflects this tendency, too: see **Yodh’ajīva S** (S 42.3), SD 23.3 (1).

¹²⁸ On brainwashing, see **Cult Buddhism**, SD 34.5 (1.1.2).

¹²⁹ See Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, “Rapunzel” [Berlin: Real schulbuchhandlung, 1812], in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 7th ed. Berlin: Dieterich, 1857. See Maria Tatar (ed), *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, NY & London: W W Norton, 2002:103-114.

¹³⁰ On the nature of fairy tales, see SD 40a.14 (3.1.3), on “the emperor’s new clothes” story.

¹³¹ On the nature and value of fairy-tales, see **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1.

awat atop a tall tower with neither stairs nor exit, with only a very high window. As Rapunzel matures, her hair grows extremely long and beautiful.

One day, a prince passing by, hears her singing. He calls out to her and she lets down her hair. In due course, she is pregnant. The witch, discovering this, lays a trap for the prince. Having caught him, she strikes him blind and exiles him in the wilderness. Rapunzel gives birth to twins and is herself exiled. She finds her blind prince and heals him with her tears. Love triumphs in the end, and they live happily ever after.

5.3.2.2 THE TALE'S SIGNIFICANCE. Psychologically, we can see "Rapunzel" as a "liberation" story, in the sense of a struggle of personal growth, in the face of hindrances and trials, and a unification of dualities. Rapunzel's father, in trying to gratify his pregnant wife's desire for rapunzel, has to pay for his transgression (stealing). Our punishments or losses are often bigger than our actual transgression, which further bring upon us other sufferings.

Rapunzel is the child in us, who is yet to know the ways of the world. The witch is some kind of authority figure in our family or religion, who wants to cast us in its own image. So we are imprisoned in a tower of over-protectiveness,¹³² which ironically cannot prevent our inner maturation, at least to some extent. Rapunzel's long growing hair represents our growing maturity and inner goodness, which not only attracts the goodness in others, but is also the way out of the society's ignorance and sufferings, that is, our self-awakening.

Rapunzel's singing represents a natural feeling of inner joy, which strikes a chord in another figure of goodness, the young prince. We might have to face great odds as we struggle to know ourselves, but if we are willing to rely upon ourselves (her long hair and singing), we will somehow discover what seems lacking in our lives (the prince). The union between Rapunzel and the prince produces twin happiness. This is like the letter and the spirit of the Dharma: our self-understanding begins with knowing the word and the way, and then its value and purpose. These are the fruits of a happy meeting of hearts, a harmonizing of calm and insight, samadhi and wisdom. The experience is both profoundly blissful and liberating.

For a moment, we seem "blind" to the world: it does not make sense to us. The reality is that it is the crowd or the world that is unable to see how we have grown spiritually. So, we are cast out all alone to complete our quest for self-fulfillment. We should not fear this aloneness, just as the Buddha goes on with his lone quest for awakening under the bodhi tree despite being deserted by the 5 monks.¹³³ In our most vital moments in life, we are alone, we must be alone: for, it is a self-discovery.

While we struggle, it seems as if an important part of us is missing, lost in some wilderness of the heart. If we are loving and faithful to ourselves and move on, we will surely unite wholly with the missing pieces of our lives. From our sufferings (Rapunzel's tears), we will learn how to heal ourselves, and so live well fulfilled and liberated lives.¹³⁴

5.4 UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF RITUALS

5.4.1 A full act. A **ritual** is a symbolic act, that is, a gesture of the body or speech reminding us of a higher level of reality and goodness. At first, the truth reminds us that we have some way to go. For example, when we bow before a Buddhist image, we remind ourselves that the Buddha, through his own effort, awakens to true reality and liberation, and that we, too, can do this.

¹³² We see this over-protectiveness in the story of **the youth Siddhattha**, whose father Suddhadana, protects in a palatial cocoon of pleasure, so that he is traumatized, when as a mature person, he first encounters the realities of life (decay, disease and death) in quick succession: **Sukhumāla S** (A 3.38), 63.7; BA 2 f; cf Yasa's story, SD 11.2 (7). Cf **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26) + SD 1.11 (1), where this is not mentioned. **Paṭācārā**, as a young girl, too, is overly protected by her father, who keeps her away from the world at top of a 7-storey building throughout the adolescence: see **Paṭācārā**, SD 43.3.

¹³³ See Reflection, "No need to give up our faith," R339, 2014. On the group of 5 monks, see SD 1.1 (1).

¹³⁴ Further see Piya Tan, "To have or to be?" (R166) *Simple Joys* 101208: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/28-To-have-or-to-be-101208.pdf>

What *empowers* our ritual action is that all our three doors work together in unison: as we bow and recite a puja, for example, we also reflect on the meaning of the words, or simply keep our hearts focused and joyful of the moment. We rejoice in the fact that even as we perform the ritual act, we are perfectly keeping to the 5 precepts: we are not killing, nor stealing, not committing sexual misconduct, not speaking falsehood, not getting drunk or heedless.

5.4.2 A true layman

5.4.2.1 If we are not yet streamwinners or saints of the path or awakened, we should train ourselves hard to be good male lay followers (*upāsaka*) and female lay followers (*upāsikā*). **The Caṇḍāla Sutta** (A 5.175) defines a **true lay follower**—called a jewel layman (*upāsaka, ratana*), a lotus layman (*upāsaka, paduma*), or a white-lotus layman (*upāsaka, puṇḍarīka*)—as having these qualities:

- (1) He has wise faith (*saddha*) in the 3 jewels.
- (2) He has moral virtue (*sīlva*).
- (3) He does not believe in rituals to invoke luck (*akotuhala, maṅgalika*).
- (4) He relies on karma, not on luck (*kammaṃ pacceti no maṅgalam*).
- (5) He does not seek the gift-worthy outside the teaching but gives his priority here (in the teaching) (*na ito bahiddhā dakkhiṇeyyaṃ gavesati idha ca pubba, kāraṃ karoti*).

(A 5.175/3:206), SD 45.12¹³⁵

5.4.2.2 **Faith** here means an unconditional acceptance of the Dharma, after having examined it carefully. If we *feel* a deep sense of joy and satisfaction in practising the Dharma (keeping the precepts, meditating or keeping mindfulness, and studying or listening to the suttas), then we *are* faithful in the Dharma.¹³⁶ Next, we could investigate deeper into the Dharma (by reflecting on the teachings, asking questions, etc), so that we develop our wisdom faculty, too.

Either way—whether we are faithfully joyful in the Dharma or we are joyfully investigating it—we need to build up our **moral virtue**, that is, harmonize our body and speech in keeping with the Dharma, so that we feel a sense of inner calm, conducive for mental cultivation and mindfulness. To expedite our keeping to the precepts, we should constantly cultivate lovingkindness [4.2.2.3].

5.2.2.3 We have discussed in some detail here why we should not cling to **rituals**, especially, believing in “luck” [2.2.2]. **Belief in luck** means that we are relegating our moral responsibility to something outside of ourselves. We need to carefully examine what our values are, and how we think. With self-understanding, we are in a better position to change ourselves, influence others, and better the situation around us. Notice how great teachers and those who really benefit society do not rely on luck, but exert themselves wisely.

In some significant ways, our present conditions are the results of our past **karma**: the kind of family we are born into, our social status, wealth, etc. We begin by accepting such conditions, and from there build up *present conditions* that conduce to our wholesome aims.¹³⁷

5.2.2.4 A vital aspect of lay discipleship is that of working for a socially mature community. If we are financially sound, we should focus our **charity** on supporting worthwhile local Buddhist efforts in building a Dharma-inspired network of Buddhists. Instead of donating willy nilly to any “charity,” we should focus in directing our resources and talents into Dharma commitment. Our vision should be that of building a local platform for people to comfortably and effectively ground themselves in the suttas and experience inner stillness. An important part of this vision is also that of promoting a strong and compassionate outreach, so that more people become aware of the Buddha Dharma and accept it into their lives.

¹³⁵ For a similar list, see **Parihāna S** (A 7.27/4:25), also called Hani S, and (**Upāsaka**) **Parābhava S** (A 5.176/4:26). See SD 12.14 Intro (2). See also **Kiñci Saṅkhāra S** (A 6.93), SD 12.14.

¹³⁶ On **faith**, see **Pubba Koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44) @ SD 10.7 (1).

¹³⁷ On the Buddha’s criticism of **selfish prayer**, see **Iṭṭha S** (A 5.43/3:47-49); cf **Alabbhanīya Thāna S** (A 5.48/3:54).

5.5 FREEDOM FROM RITUALS

5.5.1 A religion that demands all kinds of beliefs and rituals is trying to own us. But such a religion is nothing but cunning and desperate people who are trying to control our minds and use our bodies. If any belief does not benefit us, we should let it go. If we are not sure what the belief is about, it is not really benefitting us. The same with ritual: it should help bring some peace and wisdom to us. If not, we do not need it.

5.5.2 Beliefs and rituals are often nothing more than public relations and advertisements that money-priests use to create a market, hold their clientele and con the gullible. A belief often means something we are not sure about, and is not really helpful. If we care to recall our own past, we will see that it is really a record of our abandoning belief after belief, view after view. That is how we grow, by shedding the onion-skins of beliefs when the sting of truth opens our eyes.

The rituals that religious professionals charge us for—such as house-blessings and funerals—can all be more meaningfully when we conduct them ourselves, that is, together with relatives and friends. If we truly love the dearly departed, we should give him or her a truly loving friends' funeral. True and good rituals are not a public display of guilt, status or wealth, but a powerful gesture of the heart that feels good for others as well as for ourselves.

5.5.3 When Edward Bernays, the “father of public relations,” made a great fortune selling his ideas to corporations and politicians, it really benefitted no one except the corporations and politicians, and Bernays himself. People in the US were throwing their hard-earned cash into investments, making a lot of money, and living like intoxicated hamsters in the cage of pleasure and plenty. They were all heading for the Great Crash of 1929, the beginning of the 12-year Great Depression. They started blaming everyone else, except themselves.

Now, the religions are using Bernays' tricks in making us feel guilty and “sinful” about ourselves as if we are not already suffering enough, and to desire for things (like heaven) that we do not need. Of course, these religions claim they have all the answers. But these are answers to problems that these religions themselves have conjured up.

5.5.4 Religions work best where ignorance and the class system prevail. Yet more bad has been done in the name of religion than much of the rest of history put together. Religions burden us with the greatest of sufferings when they try to define good and bad for us, even against our better judgement and common sense. The more powerful the religion, the greater the damage it does.¹³⁸

Better than any religion is an open curiosity for the healing truth and liberating insight; a relentless questioning that only brings the joy and peace of helpful answers that fruit in self-understanding. And the best person to examine and ask such questions is we ourselves. For, if we do not think for ourselves, we will lose our minds; if we stop feeling, then we are dead. The chains are mind-made, only the mind can break them.¹³⁹

5.6 SPIRITUAL INDEPENDENCE

5.6.1 Knowledge that is independent of others. The Dharma taught by the Buddha is like cooking instructions and recipes, but we as students must prepare the dishes ourselves and, most importantly, take the meals ourselves so that we are nourished.¹⁴⁰ The Buddha's teachings, both whose meaning has been drawn out and whose meaning needs to be drawn out,¹⁴¹ are like instructions for a journey complete with maps. After listening to the instructions and studying the maps, we must venture out ourselves to reach our destination.¹⁴² In this connection, the streamwinner is often described as one “who has crossed beyond

¹³⁸ See eg this documentary on church abuse of children: <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/sex-crimes-and-the-vatican/> & its transcript <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/panorama/5402928.stm>.

¹³⁹ See Reflection, “Buddhism sets you free,” R223, 2012 = *Revisioning Buddhism*, Singapore, 2012: ch 48 (online). On attachment to rituals and vows, see further **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3 (5.3).

¹⁴⁰ On significance of food (*āhāra*), see (**Nīvaraṇa Bojjhaṅga**) **Āhāra S** (S 46.51/5:102-107), SD 7.15 Intro.

¹⁴¹ See **Neyy'attha Nī'tattha S** (A 2.3.4+5/1:60), SD 2.6b.

¹⁴² See **Nagara S** (S 12.65.19-33/2:105-107), SD 14.2.

doubt, become free of uncertainties, gained fearless confidence, and dwells in the teaching independent of others” (*tiṇṇa, vicikiccho vigata, katham. katho vesārajja-p, patto apara-p, paccayo satthu, sāsane viharatī ti*).¹⁴³

In the Kaccāyana, gotta Sutta (S 12.15), the Buddha speaks of the saints’ independent awakening in these words:

6 This world, Kaccāna, is mostly bound by fixation [attachment], clinging and inclination.¹⁴⁴

6.2 But this person (with right view) does not engage in, cling to, incline towards that fixation and clinging, the latent tendency of mindset and inclination—he does not take a stand (that anything is) ‘my self’.¹⁴⁵

6.3 He has neither uncertainty nor doubt that what arises is only suffering arising, what ceases is only suffering ceasing.¹⁴⁶ His knowledge about this is independent of others.¹⁴⁷

(S 12.15/2:17), SD 6.13

5.6.2 Sāriputta’s independence. One of the most fascinating Buddhist verses is **Dhammapada verse 97**, a riddle (to the unawakened) uttered by the Buddha in connection with Sāriputta’s awakening, thus:

<i>Assaddho akataññū ca sandhi-c, chedo ca yo naro hatāvakāso vantāso sa ve uttama, poriso.</i>	Not through faith, but knowing the unmade, the man who has broken the connection, eliminated the opening (for rebirth), given up desire— he is indeed a supreme person. (Dh 97; cf Dh 383)
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The Dhammapada Commentary explains *asaddho* as meaning “by virtue of his own realization, not through faith in the word of another” (DhA 2:187).¹⁴⁸ **The Pubba Koṭṭhaka Sutta** (S 48.44) relates how the Buddha asks Sāriputta whether he has faith (*saddahāsi tvam Sāriputta*) that the 5 faculties (*pañc’ in-*

¹⁴³ **Cūḷa Saccaka S** (M 35.24/1:234), SD 26.5; **Mahā Vaccha, gotta S** (M 73.10/1:491), SD 27.4.

¹⁴⁴ “bound ... adherence,” PTS *upāy’upādānābhinivesa, vinibandha*, but preferred reading is Be Ce *upāy’upādānābhinivesa, vinibaddha = upāya* (attachment, fixation) + *upādāna* (clinging) + *abhinivesa* (inclination, mindset, adherence) + *vinibaddha* (bound, shackled) [alt reading *vinibandha*, bondage]. Comy: Each of the three—fixation, clinging, inclination [mindset]—arise by way of craving (*taṇhā*) and views (*diṭṭhi*), for, it is through these that one fixates to, clings to, inclines to the phenomena of the three spheres as “I” and “mine.” (SA 2:33). These 3 words appear to be syns or near-syns of latent tendencies, but I have rendered them in order of their subtlety (fixation, clinging, inclination [mindset]). See S:B 736 n31.

¹⁴⁵ “But this ... ‘My self’,” *tañ cāyam upāy’upādānaṃ cetaso adhiṭṭhānaṃ abhinivesānusayaṃ na upeti na upādiyati nādhiṭṭhati “attā me” ti*. Comy: Craving and views are called “mental standpoint” (*cetaso adhiṭṭhana*) because they are the foundation for the (unwholesome) mind, and “the latent tendency of inclination [mindset],” or perhaps “inclination [mindset] and latent tendency” (*abhinivesānusaya*) because they remain in the mind and lie latent there (SA 2:33). This is a difficult sentence, and I am guided more by the Sutta spirit than by the letter. See S:B 736 n32. Cf **Hālidakāni S 1** (S 22.3,9/3:10), SD 10.12.

¹⁴⁶ Comy: Suffering (*dukkha*) here refers to the 5 aggregates of clinging. What the noble disciple sees, when he reflects on his own existence, is not a self or a substantially existent person but only the arising and passing away of causal conditions (*paccay’uppanna, nirodha*) (of dependent arising) (SA 2:33). Cf **Selā’s** verses (S 548-551/1:134) & **Vajirā’s** verses (S 553-55/1:135).

¹⁴⁷ “Independent of others,” *apara-p, paccayā*. From streamwinning on, the noble disciple sees the truth of the Dharma by himself, and as such is not dependent on anyone else, not even the Buddha, for his insight into the Dharma. However, he may still approach the Buddha or an awakened teacher for instructions and guidance in meditation until he attains liberation himself.

¹⁴⁸ *Attanā paṭiladdha, guṇaṃ paresaṃ kathāya na saddahatī ti assaddho*. Earlier on, Buddhaghosa tells an intro story that is very similar to that related in **Pubba, koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44/5:220), SD 10.7, although the stanza is not found there: see **Dh 97** (SD 10.6 (7.3)).

driya) of faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, when practised, lead to nirvana (*amata, -pariyosānam*).¹⁴⁹

Sāriputta replies that he does *not* here go by faith in the Buddha in this matter (*na bhagavato saddhāya gacchāmi*). Others who have not realized this for themselves through wisdom (*paññāya*) would have faith in others in this matter (*yesaṃ hi taṃ bhante aññataṃ assa ... te tattha paresaṃ saddhāya gaccheyyurū*). In other words, those who have realized this for themselves would be without doubt (*nibbicikkichā*) in the matter, as he himself has, and is, as such, without doubt in the matter. The Buddha then lauds him.

In the Dhammapada Commentary, the Buddha declares this of Sāriputta:

Indeed, Sāriputta goes not by faith in others, for the reason that he has by himself attained the truth of the path and fruit by way of insight based on dhyana (*jhāna, vipassanā, magga, phala, -dhammesu*).
(DhA 7.8/2:186 f ad Dh 97), SD 10.6

Clearly, this is a description of Sariputta's being "liberated both ways" (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*). Both Sāriputta and Moggallāna are arhats "liberated both ways." All arhats are perfectly liberated in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration, that is, liberated from the physical body by means of the formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood.¹⁵⁰

5.6.3 Citta the householder's independence. The *Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta Sutta* (S 41.8) relates the householder Citta's declaration that is similar to Sāriputta's statement on faith and wisdom [5.6.2]. The essence of the interesting dialogue between Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta and the householder Citta is as follows:

"Householder, do you have faith in the recluse Gotama when he says, 'There is a concentration without applied thought and sustained thought, there is a cessation of applied thought and sustained thought'?"

"Here, bhante, **I do not go by faith** in the Blessed One ... " (*na khvāhaṃ ettha bhante bhagavato saddhāya gacchāmi...*).
(S 41.8,5/4:298), SD 40.7

Here, we can either see the astute Citta is laying a verbal trap which he later springs, or that the Nigaṇṭha simply misunderstands Citta's answer. While he seems to be disclaiming allegiance to the Buddha, he is actually simply asserting that he has realized the truth of the Buddha's statement *by personal experience* and thus need not rely on mere faith in the Buddha's word.

Citta then asks Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, which is superior: knowledge (*ñāṇa*) or faith (*saddhā*). And the Nigaṇṭha replies that it is knowledge. Based on this statement of the Nigaṇṭha, Citta then declares his own knowledge in this famous statement (which he also declares to Acela Kassapa):¹⁵¹

"...to whatever extent I wish, bhante, quite detached from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome mental states, I enter and dwell in the **first dhyana**, accompanied by applied thought and sustained thought, accompanied by zest and happiness, born of seclusion."¹⁵²

Then, to whatever extent I wish, bhante, with the stilling of applied thought and sustained thought, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, I enter and dwell in **the second**

¹⁴⁹ S 48.44/5:220 (SD 10.7).

¹⁵⁰ On Sāriputta's awakening, see **Pubba Koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44) @ SD 10.7 (4). See also **Dhammapada 97**, SD 10.6, esp (2).

¹⁵¹ **Acela (Kassapa) S** (S 41.9,8/4:301). The famous dhyana passage is stock: D 22,21/2:314 f, M 141,31/3:252; also D 2,75-81/1:73-75, M 27,19-22/1:181 f.

¹⁵² *Vivicc'eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi sa, vitakkaṃ sa, vicāraṃ viveka, jaṇi pīti, sukhaṃ paṭhama-j, -jhānaṃ.*

dhyana, free from applied thought and sustained thought, accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration.¹⁵³

Then, to whatever extent I wish, bhante, with the fading away of zest, I remain equanimous, mindful and fully aware, and experience happiness with the body. I enter and dwell in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’¹⁵⁴

Then, to whatever extent I wish, bhante, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain—and with the earlier disappearance of happiness and grief—I enter and dwell in **the fourth dhyana**, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.¹⁵⁵

Since I know and see thus, bhante, in what other ascetic or brahmin shall I place faith¹⁵⁶ as regard that there is a concentration without applied thought and sustained thought, that there is a cessation of applied thought and sustained thought? (S 41.8,8/4:298 f)¹⁵⁷

The Nigaṇṭha thinks that Citta does not take the Buddha’s word for it, that is, he does not have faith in the Buddha. Citta, however, answers obliquely meaning that it is not because of faith in the Buddha, but because he knows it from his own experience, meaning that he does not need to take the Buddha’s word for it simply, because he knows it for himself. The point is that Citta is declaring that as a saint, he is emotionally independent of others, but has great faith in the Buddha.¹⁵⁸

6 Emotional independence or emotional alienation?¹⁵⁹

6.1 We have heard this at least once in our lives, when someone, usually angry or frustrated, cries out, saying, “I don’t need anyone. I’m capable of being happy by myself.” If we said this as a negative reaction, we are likely to fall into **emotional alienation**, that is, cutting ourselves off from what is good in us, so that we end up privately nursing our wounds and putting up a falsely positive front.

The problem with such a reaction is that we might make summary judgements, tarring everyone else with the same sticky brush. Then, we are really alienated, incapable of love, and fearing even to believe in friendship. So, we end up as cynics, waiting to point out the next self-prophesized fault or pain episode in ourselves or in anyone.

6.2 And yet, happiness, in its true sense, is a very personal thing: it has nothing to do with anyone else. This is not to say that we cannot be happy on account of someone else, but this kind of happiness is conditioned by others, and, as such, is not within our control, so to speak.

On the other hand, if we learn to be habitually happy—such as through our reflections and meditations—then, we are always able to maintain some lever of inner peace, like the eye of a storm, a still centre while the storm rages around us. To be unconditionally happy in this way, we must understand and

¹⁵³ *Vitakka, vicārānaṃ vūpasamā ajjhataṃ sampasadānaṃ cetaso ekodi, bhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhi-jāṃ pīti, sukhaṃ dutiya-j, jhānaṃ.* The 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya, tuṅhī, bhāva*) because within it applied thought and sustained thought (thinking and discursion, *vitakka, vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur (S 2:273); cf S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī, saṅkhāra*), the mental factor responsible for speech. In **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie, either talk Dharma or meditate).

¹⁵⁴ *Pītiyā ca virāgā ca upekkhā ca viharati sato ca sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti yan taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti, “upekkhako satimā sukha, viharīti tatiya-j, jhānaṃ.*

¹⁵⁵ *Sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā pubbe va somanassa, domanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkham asukhaṃ upekkhā, sati, parisuddhiṃ catuttha-j, jhānaṃ.*

¹⁵⁶ *So khvāhaṃ bhante evaṃ jānanto evaṃ passanto kassaññassa samaṇassa vā brāhmaṇassa vā saddhāya gamis-sāmi.*

¹⁵⁷ See **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5(8).

¹⁵⁸ See Reflection, “Don’t be a fan, be cool yourself!” R451, 2016.

¹⁵⁹ Orig published as a Reflection, “Emotional independence or emotional alienation?” R180, 2011 = *Simple Joys* 2, no 54, Singapore, 2012:153-156.

accept the reality of impermanence—and lovingkindness practice helps us to better internalize this experience.¹⁶⁰

6.3 The universal law of change, however, has a silver lining: **everyone and everything change**. We too will change—for the better. Surely, we would rather change for the better, for greater happiness. We can only begin this positive inner change when we have learned not to own any pain.¹⁶¹ This simply means that we should not identify with any pain, that is, by avoiding the use of “I,” “me” and “mine” towards a painful experience or memory.

Once the self-healing and growth starts, we build up our emotional independence, too. Simply put, no matter what happens, when we are truly emotionally independent, we are not only able to cope with any situation, but we consistently see a bright rainbow and feel the fresh air enlivening us after the storm clouds have departed.

6.4 The path to emotional independence begins with **unconditional self-acceptance**. We simply need to constantly remind ourselves, “I accept myself just as I am.” This is a powerful mantra against those who have been telling us, loudly or tacitly, that we are no good or not good enough. Or, we can keep telling ourselves, “I’m a lotus leaf standing well above the muddy waters. Rain-drops fall on me but they simply run off.” If we have difficulties visualizing, then sit by a lotus or water-lily pond and reflect on this.

6.5 The Buddha taught **the 5-element meditation** to his own son, Rāhula.¹⁶² The 5 elements (which are the dynamic states of physical existence) are earth, water, fire, wind and space. These reflections are very simple and effective so that they are favourites in our children’s meditation classes.

When we see raw or rich earth (“raw,” such as in a farm or a building site, and “rich,” such as the grounds of a vegetable patch or flower garden), spend a few minutes to reflect on it thus: People throw all kinds of rubbish on the earth, and step all over it; trees and plants grow on it, and so on. **The earth** does not complain, but compassionately accepts, nourishes and supports all. *May I be like the earth, compassionate and supportive of everyone.*

The next time we sit by a lake or have a chance to look at a calm sea, reflect on **water**, thus: Water gives us life, quenches our thirst; we wash and clean ourselves with it, and so on. *May I be like water, giving life to others, making them happy, and clearing my mind of all negative thoughts.*

Fire is an easy reflection subject. When you notice a flame (say, a candle light or kitchen fire) or some bright light, reflect thus: *May I be like fire: it gives us warmth, it cooks our food, gives us light, and burns away impurities.* May I be like fire, burning away all negative thoughts and memories, putting warmth and light into my life and the lives of those I love and care for. May I bring radiant joy wherever I go.

The **wind** element can be detected by way of the movement of curtains and mobiles indoors, by the waving leaves and dancing flowers in the open, and by its cool gentle touch. The wind is our breath, our life: *May I be like the wind, giving life and comfort to others.* May I treasure those whom I love like my own breath; for they breathe, too.

Space fills our bodily cavities: the mouth, the chest, the belly, and we fill the space around us with our own shape, just as it is. Space separates us from those we love, and yet connects us no matter how vast it is. *May I be like space, allowing my loved ones, my children, friends, colleagues, and people I meet, to live their lives.* May I fully accept them like the space that embraces them and me just as we are.

6.5 We should choose our favourite element and its reflection, and use it as pillow talk, that is, the last thing we silently and joyfully remind ourselves of before we fall asleep. If we wake up in the middle of the night, simply get into this reflection mode. In due course, these happy words will become spontan-

¹⁶⁰ On lovingkindness, see (**Karaṇīya**) **Metta S** (S 1.8), SD 38.3.

¹⁶¹ See Reflection, “Don’t Own the Pain,” R122, 2010 = *Simple Joys 2*, no 19, Singapore 2012:59-62.

¹⁶² See **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 62.13-17/1:423 f), SD 3.11.

eous. Oh yes, we will have a lot of sweet dreams, too. Sleep happily, live happily: this is to be truly emotionally independent, that is, we have become **a true individual**, so that we can each declare of ourselves:

“I have destroyed hell, the animal birth, the realm of the departed [ghosts], the plane of misery, the evil destiny, the lower realm. I am a streamwinner, not bound for the lower world, sure of going over to self-awakening!” (D 16,2.8/2:93)¹⁶³

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Appendix

Identifying Personality Disorders

<http://www.humana-military.com/south/bene/health-wellness/Behavioral%20Health/BehavioralHealthpersonalitydisorders.asp>

There are **10 main types of personality disorders**: paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal, antisocial, borderline, histrionic, narcissistic, avoidant, dependent and obsessive-compulsive. Personality disorders all have in common behaviours that make it very hard for us to get along with others at home, at work, at school, and in personal relationships. Such behaviours are difficult to change (especially when we are not ourselves even aware of them), happen repeatedly, and often started when we were teenagers or young adults. We are generally not aware of such problem behaviours and become angry or sad when told of them by others. Treatment, however, helps to improve our quality of life and relationships.

Paranoid personality disorder: We are very fearful of others, that others are out to harm us. We persistently hold grudges and are unforgiving of insults, and are recurrently suspicious.

Schizoid personality disorder: We do not have social relationships, have limited expression of emotions when in the company of others, do not want or enjoy relationships (even with family), and almost always prefer doing things alone.

Schizotypal personality disorder: We have extreme discomfort with close relationships, hold odd beliefs (supernatural), have odd ways of talking, acting, and dressing, have few friends or relationships outside close family, and have excessive social anxiety even with people familiar to us.

Antisocial personality disorder: We repeatedly do things resulting in arrests, are deceitful, do not plan ahead or see consequences, recklessly disregard our own safety and the safety of others, consistently fail to honour responsibilities, cannot keep a job, and do not feel guilt or remorse for wrongs done.

Borderline personality disorder: We frantically fear and avoid abandonment (real or unreal), has intense relationships that do not last, see others in a black and white way: either others are all good or all bad, have an extremely unstable self-image, are impulsive (sex, spending, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating), almost always feel empty on the inside, and cannot control anger. (In Buddhist mythology, this is an aspect of the life of a hell-being.)

Histrionic personality disorder: We need to be the centre of attention, are often sexually provocative with others, have rapidly shifting shallow exaggerated emotional expressions, use our physical appearance to get attention, are easily influenced by others, and believe our relationships to be closer than they actually are. (In Buddhist mythology, this is an aspect of the life of an asura.)

Narcissistic personality disorder: We have an extremely exaggerated view of our importance to others, of our abilities, believe that we are so exceptional that we can only interact with other exceptional people, are arrogant and envious of others, and take advantage of others to get what we want. (In Buddhist mythology, this is the asura.)

¹⁶³ Further, on emotional independence, see *Atammayātī*, SD 19.13 (7.6).

Avoidant personality disorder: We almost always feel disapproval, criticism, or rejection by others, interact with others only if certain of being liked, have extreme fear of being shamed or ridiculed, avoid social interactions because of feelings of inadequacy, and avoid taking risks in personal relationships for fear of embarrassment.

Dependent personality disorder: We need frequent reassurance and advice from others to make every day decisions, avoid expressing disagreement with others for fear of losing support or other's approval, feel uncomfortable or helpless when alone, feel exaggerated fear of being unable to care for ourselves, and urgently seek another relationship when one ends. (In Buddhist mythology, this is the preta.)

Obsessive-compulsive personality disorder: We are preoccupied with details, rules, lists, orderliness, organization, or schedules to the point that the task originally attempted is forgotten and not completed. We are excessively devoted to work to the exclusion of leisure activities, inflexible on morals, ethics, and values, and are very rigid or stubborn. (In terms of a very routine and unthinking life, this would be, in mythical terms, the animal life.)

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